

GLORY ROAD



AUVERGNE ME



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GLORY ROAD

By

AUVERGNE MEREDITH

~

Author of

FROM SOUP TO NUTS

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ZENOBIA STARR, suddenly left an orphan in a lonely roadside stopping place on Highway 66, and Hi Hills, her nearest neighbor, are both faced with seemingly endless obstacles, but imbued with high ambitions.

These two lovable people, the friends they make, and the enemies and problems which beset them, are so much like life hands to each of us, that it is easy, adventurous and enjoyable to fellow them and relive their unusual experiences.

(Continued on back flap)



Signed

695

Christmas 1960

To:

Mrs Alice Russell
who's friendship will
always remain an
inspiration to me.

My very best wishes
for this year's holiday
Season and for many
more years to come.

Sincerely,

Austergne Meredith.

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2006

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— *By* —

AUVERGNE MEREDITH

Author of

"From Soup To Nuts"

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To:

Dorothy Lamour, Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, three wonderful people whose mythical journeys along many roads, from Rio to Singapore, have brought clean fun and entertainment to millions of people, I humbly dedicate the adventures of GLORY ROAD to you.

Sincerely,

AUVERGNE MEREDITH

Chapter One

A PRETTY GIRL CAUSES MUCH SPECULATION

ONLY ONE PAIR of the twenty-three pairs of eyes aboard the Greyhound bus, had failed to notice the young, slender and definitely attractive girl who boarded the West-bound bus at Tulsa. This in spite of the early hour of two o'clock in the morning, and the moving lights and shadows of that quiet and sleepy period of the night.

The one pair of unobserving eyes were those of an elderly gentleman, who had spent most of his seventy-two years on farms in the productive state of Oklahoma. Having lost much sleep while at the bedside of an elderly sister in Monett, Mo., during her last illness, the old fellow had dozed off to sleep after leaving Vinita, and had not aroused until midway between Tulsa and Sapulpa. Then he lay back on the reclining seat and admired the sculptured profile of the girl, who occupied the seat which had been vacant, when he went to sleep.

The driver of the bus noticed the slenderness of her gloved hand as she handed her ticket to him. He had glanced a second time at the destination stamped on the small bit of paper; and as he passed along the quiet county highway, he glanced at the pretty face in the mirror above the windshield and continued to wonder why this particular girl should be going to that particular place.

The two middle-aged men who occupied the seat nearest the door, silently tried to guess whether the young lady was a "miss" or a recent bride—not that it mattered so much to either of them, for they were both happily married. A prim, business-like lady who, a few years ago had been a buyer for a large department store, was curious about the origin of the girl's attire, especially the becoming black hat; which seemed to have been especially designed for her. It looked so becoming where it was perched just back of the two heavy braids of dark hair, done in coronet fashion, above the smooth broad forehead. The tiny mesh veil came to the tip of the firm chin, but did not conceal the alluring lips on which

barely a trace of lipstick could be seen, or the nose, as perfect in shape as that done by a clever artist or sculpture, nor the two serious grey eyes which were adorned by long, natural, eyelashes and arched eye brows which required no mascara.

The lady who had visited many of the better stores in the East, was almost positive that there was a French label in the becoming little hat and perhaps in the tailored suit of rich, black woolen material as well. She thought of the slender form so becomingly attired, as though a model had stepped from a fashionable shop window and into the west-bound bus. The former buyer of expensive and fashionable apparel, would have been dismayed had she known that both the suit and hat had been purchased at the very store in Tulsa where she had been employed only a short time ago!

Flo and Babs, two alert, flashily dressed teen-agers who were on their way to resume their studies in Phoenix, reclined with their pillowed heads close together and carried on a whispered discussion of the girl in black, who had placed a small, black overnite case and a black cloth coat on the rack above the window and sat alone, three seats back of the driver, looking out into the late September night.

"I'll bet she is a movie star on her way back to Hollywood!" Flo remarked; as she studied the classic profile of the girl in black.

"Oh no silly! If she was a movie queen she'd be traveling by airplane, a private compartment on a streamliner—or at least in a big limousine with a uniformed chauffeur!" Babs replied.

"Well, maybe she isn't actually a *star*; but she could be an important bit player—but still, I've read of many cinema stars who travel incognito on trains and busses. Why, I read about one who hitch-hiked across the country, just to see what it would be like and to be able to register the right emotions in the picture she was to appear in!"

"Yes, I read that story and I think that actress had the right idea, to gather the proper atmosphere and get the correct perspective of the girl hitch-hiker she was to represent."

"Bet that hat and suit cost a pretty penny!" Flo said.

"Wish nature had seen fit to use a pattern for me what called for long dark tresses and a slim figure, instead of one that turned out a short, plump, freckled affair with faded brown hair like me!"

"And just notice, I beg of you, how dignified and refreshingly 'different' she looks with her hair done in those long braids!" Flo continued, as though her companion had not spoken. "Why my hair was as long and as dark as hers before I swallowed my own tastes and convictions and followed the advice of others, who were in no position to say what was or was not admired by the fashion-wise, and had my own naturally wavy hair sheared off above my ears, and some unbecoming and unmanagable artificial curls and kinks burned into what was left of my own hair, and I've been living under the frizzled mess ever since!"

"Well, Flo *I* advised you not to have your hair cut. Why, it was the most attractive part of your entire make-up. It was every bit as pretty as that girl's hair is, but you wouldn't listen to me. You insisted *they* weren't wearing long braids or rolls of hair anymore and that Dame Style demanded short bobs, ringlets and—well you followed the *pack*, and here you are with your artificial curls, admiring a strange girl with a crowning glory that an Angel would be proud to wear!"

A lady who had passed her seventy-eighth birthday and whose snow-white hair formed a becoming frame for her serene face, with blue eyes and gentle mouth, and ended in a generous biscuit-shaped coil at the nap of her neck, smiled to herself. Her blue eyes seemed to look back into the past, as her memory recalled that her dark brown hair had been almost as dark and as abundant as that of the girl who had boarded the bus. A strong impulse urged her to move up beside the girl, so that she might tell her how beautiful she was and to advise her to hold fast and to cherish that rare gift of Nature. But she resolved that the girl with the beautiful long hair appeared self-reliant and was wise not to require any coaching from an old lady like herself, so she smiled, closed her eyes and slept until she reached her destination at Oklahoma City.

A young man who was studying art, took a pencil and attempted to sketch a likeness of the girl's profile on the back of a letter from where he sat across the aisle from Babs and Flo. The motion of the bus prevented him from making accurate lines; but he drew an outline of the forehead, the braids of hair, the pretty nose, the determined chin, firm mouth and the artistic curve of the throat, where it disappeared inside the soft folds of the white blouse and of the rounded bust in the smooth-fitting jacket.

His aesthetic senses thrilled at sight of the delicate and beautifully formed ear. To an artist, ears have ever so many detectable meanings. He was immediately pleased with his model; and he filled in accurate lines each time the bus paused at a station. It seemed as though she might be posing especially for him. With the light of inspiration shining in his eyes, and the joy of having, after a long search, found a living model for his visionary personality whom he referred to as his "DREAM GIRL", and with the great satisfaction of having captured that vision on a scrap of paper, he placed the paper in a long envelope. Then he placed it in the security of his inside coat pocket. He felt confident that a beautiful image of what he had imagined, then had seen in the flesh, would soon be recorded on canvas.

Zenobia Starr was unmindful of all the speculation of her fellow travelers, concerning her—or of the artist having sketched a remarkable likeness of her, as the big coach moved or paused. Her mind was too full of important problems which she alone must solve. She realized that, very soon, she must make one of the most important and critical decisions of her whole life. Past happenings and future events seemed to have her cornered in a very narrow space—no wider in scope, than the aisle between the two rows of seats in the bus.

Metaphorically speaking, she could move back into the rear seat where she would be safe and comfortable while she just sat and watched the rest of the world glide by, or she could rush out the door into the country highway, or a city street, and take a chance on ultimately reaching a destination of satisfaction and achievement. She frankly admitted to herself that, on the latter course she might stumble over numerous unseen obstacles and that the road would not be an easy one; but she knew what she wanted and was not afraid of temporary setbacks nor of the normal contacts, conflicts and contests with the mass of humanity which goes to make up the general public. The alternate of this course would cast her into the role of an everyday housewife, home maker, and perhaps the mother of children—which the statisticians, philosophers and theosophists often claim is the mainspring, the bulwark and the sturdy backbone as well as the guiding hand of civilization in general and our own nation in particular. Zenobia wanted a home and children eventually—after her first quest had ended. She knew full well that the two courses before her led in opposite directions;

that to follow one seemed to mean that she must abandon the other—or would it?

As she leaned back on the cushioned chair, the lights from oilfield operations, of other motor cars on the highway, a few blinking lights from the sleepy towns of Kellyville, Stroud, Bristow and Chandler passed unnoticed. She was trying to pierce her own future, trying desperately to look far enough ahead to see some possibility that those two paths which started off in opposite directions and with different purposes, might somewhere, some place and by some trick of Fate, arrive at the same destination, the same focal point in her future. Being a healthy, normal girl of barely twenty years, she possessed a certain amount of glamorous ambitions, as well as being endowed with a natural feminine instinct and desire for the security of a home and offspring of her own, to make that home perfect.

At Oklahoma City a thirty minute stop was made where Zenobia and most of the other passengers left the bus and strolled about the huge modern bus terminal. Babs and Flo noticed the graceful poise while she stood and the delightful carriage of her slender form as she walked about. She appeared warm and friendly, yet she remained apart from the others, as though her thoughts were sufficient company. The young artist filled his mind with inspiration from his unsuspecting model.

The recent loss of her father, the financial set-backs and the momentous decisions she faced, kept her mind so preoccupied that she was impervious to the looks of admiration and curiosity cast her direction. She smiled sweetly and stepped aside and assisted the little old lady with the snow-white hair descend the three steps leading from the bus. Later she picked up one of Bab's gloves from where she had dropped it on the platform and returned it to her, then she resumed her meditations until the bus passed through Clinton. Then becoming impatient, she removed her coat and bag from the over-head rack and placed them on the vacant seat beside her. The sun was just peeping over the rim of the sprawling plains and the low, irregular hills, when she reached up and pressed the button to signal a stop.

They were only a few miles from the Oklahoma-Texas line and there was no town in sight. At one side of the highway was a small, weatherbeaten filling station bearing the sign: "HILLS' GAS STATION", over the driveway to the three pumps. There was an upstairs room over the service room,

which was topped by a V shaped roof. Two small windows in the upper story gave the appearance of a weather indicator to such an extent that one was inclined to half expect a bird or a witch to appear at one of the windows, to announce the type of weather that was forthcoming. A narrow stairway at the side from which they were approaching, led to an upstairs room and two rough pillars supported the roof over the driveway. Near the grease rack, a few feet from the main building, stood a small roadster; the exact color, whether black, blue, green or tan was indiscernable in the dim light of early dawn; and the exact make or model of the car posed a hazardous guess for anyone, no matter how well informed he might be as to the characteristics of motor cars.

The only signs of life about the forlorn looking service station was a dust-covered, light blue sedan with a flat left rear tire, and a frantic driver at the wheel pressing intermittently on the horn, leaning out and yelling "hello!" in an attempt to arouse the attendant—if one was on the premises, as the sign on the upper portion of the pump cover, which read: "EMERGENCY SERVICE ANY TIME DAY OR NIGHT" announced. The anxious faces of three women appeared at the windows of the disabled car.

At almost the opposite side of the highway stood an eighteen by twenty-four foot building of hastily assembled siding which housed a lunch room. The white, newly painted outside looked fresh and clean when compared to the dingy service station. Over the one wide window in the front of the building was a four foot electric sign designed in the shape of a star; in the five points appeared the letters S-T-A-R-R and across the center the word LUNCH. The lights were on and a man in a white apron appeared at the door at one corner of the building and began sweeping the front steps. Near the West side of the lunch room, and under the shady branches of two tall oak trees, whose leaves were tinged with colors of gold, russet and variegated brown, stood a large house trailer.

"Are you sure this is where you want off, Miss?" The driver asked as he reluctantly brought the big vehicle to a standstill.

"Yes sir—thank you!" Zenobia replied, then tripped lightly down the steps and onto the ground of red-colored clay and sand. Both driver and passengers wondered what possible business had brought the girl to this desolate looking place. The bus roared away, leaving Zenobia standing for a

second until the dust and smoke cleared away; then she walked the twenty feet to the door of the lunchroom.

"Buenos dias! Senorita!" The man in the white apron greeted as she approached.

"Good morning Tony!" she replied, "Those people in the car seem to be in need of help. Do you know whether Hi is in his room or not?"

"Si, he sleep—Senor in motor have Llanta picada!"

"Here, you take my bag and set it inside. I'll go and try to awaken that sleepy-head; but after sleeping through all the noise the driver is making, I doubt if he can be awakened!" Zenobia said, and as the driver sounded another loud, insistent blast on the horn, she called:

"Just a moment sir, I'll see if I can arouse the attendant!" She noticed that the door to the room over the station was open and shaking her head disapprovingly, she said as she walked in front of the car: "He is asleep upstairs and is a very determined sleeper—but I'll awaken him if I have to use a pail full of cold water to accomplish it!"

"Do tell him to hurry! We need a new tire and we're on our way to attend a wedding in El Reno. We'll never get there in time if we don't get started soon!" the woman seated beside the driver said with unveiled impatience.

"I'll tell him to hurry!" Zenobia assured them as she ran up the narrow stairway. She was positive that Hiram Hills, the owner of the gas station was up there, for Sylvia, the odd-looking roadster was there; and few were the times when Hi went any place without Sylvia. Sure enough, when she reached the open door to the sixteen by sixteen foot room, she saw just what she had seen a number of times before and what she expected to see this time. Hi Hills, a tall, husky man in his late twenties, was sound asleep on an army cot which was placed in the center of the otherwise empty room. The grey light which appeared through the two bare windows and the open doorway, revealed the relaxed form of the young man stretched out on the drab-colored cot and covered with a blanket of vivid hues of blue, green, red and yellow in a bold block design, which seemed to reach out at her like the claws of a huge paw.

"Ugh! I don't see how anyone could sleep under that horrid blanket!" she said aloud; hoping that the sound of her voice, criticising Hi's favorite blanket would awaken him.

But he neither stirred nor missed an even inhale or exhale of the even breathing. Zenobia smiled and shook her head in an "I give up" manner as her eyes roved about the crude, barren room. On one of the unfinished walls was Hi's best suit, one of a pretty shade of dark brown—which she recalled, was very becoming to his brown eyes and slightly wavy dark brown hair.

A worn, brown leather suitcase was on the dusty floor with the lid thrown back against the wall revealing shirts of tan and white, shorts and socks of colors and designs almost as varied and unusual as the blanket under which he slept. A suit of greasy, mechanic's coveralls and a cap had been tossed across an empty packing box which had been used as a chair, and a pair of soiled, scuffed shoes, and cotton socks lay on the floor beside the cot. Next to the leg at the head of the make-shift bed, sat a small canvas bag—the kind used by cashiers, business houses and concession owners to keep the day's cash in after closing hours. In other cases, the bag and its valuable contents would have been placed in a safe, or hidden away where it could not have been easily found; but Hi had simply dropped it on the floor beside his bed and gone to sleep, without a worry about it being stolen.

Zenobia picked up the bag, felt the roll of folding money and a teacup full of coins inside and said in a stage whisper:

"Business must have been very good yesterday—or else he's been hoarding his money during the five days I've been away!"

Holding the money bag in her left hand, she ran the tip of her right forefinger over his forehead and down the slightly curving top of his nose. He raised one grease-streaked hand and tried to brush away what he thought to be a fly from his face, then turned over and pulled the gaudily colored blanket up to his eyebrows. Zenobia shook his shoulder and said:

"Hi, wake up! There's a tire to be fixed!"

"I fixed that darned car from front bumper to tail light last night!" He mumbled sleepily.

"That was another car, silly! There's another one waiting; and they're in a desperate hurry. Come on Hi, wake up!"

The sound of heavy breathing was his only reply; so she placed the bag of money on the box beside the work clothes and saying to herself, "This will arouse him when nothing else will" she cupped her hands to her mouth to represent a bugle and sounded a shrill reveille, which brought Hi to a sitting posture on the side of the cot. He was in the act of

tossing the many-colored blanket aside when he noticed the smiling girl standing before him. Suddenly remembering that he was wearing nothing more than a sleeveless undershirt and a pair of shorts—the colors and pattern of which made those of the blanket look drab, he pulled the blanket close up to his chin, tucked one corner around one hairy leg and exclaimed:

“Hello Zenobia! When did you get back?”

“About two minutes ago; and I’ve spent that much time trying to get you awake! Hurry up and get dressed, there’s a flat tire to be repaired for a wedding party!”

“Oh ’Nobia!” he exclaimed happily, “You’ve decided to marry me! Oh gosh, I don’t mind if Sylvia has a few flat tires, I’ll hire a limousine for this occasion—I—”

An impatient honk from the car below cut him short and gave her a chance to exclaim:

“No, Hi, I’ve not decided yet—but those people down there are waiting for you. There are other’s getting married. Are you coming down and fix that tire or shall I go and replace it?”

“Oh I’ll be right down! Hang it all honey, I—I—aw confound it, some people have all the luck!”

Zenobia tossed the money bag to him as she said: “Here stupid, is your money you left in plain sight for someone to make away with while you are in those trances you call sleep!” Then she left the room, ran down the steps and assured the impatient travelers that the mechanic would be right down to replace the worn tire.

Crossing the highway, she walked to the door of the house trailer, unlocked it and entered. The interior of the coach was thirty-three feet long, with windows at each side and both ends. The woodwork was of polished mahogany; with mirrors and receding landscape scenes placed between the windows to give the appearance of being much wider than the slightly less than eight feet it actually was. The floor was covered with soft, grey-green carpet, with a strip of green, marbelized linoleum before the sink and stove. There was an air of comfort and usefulness about the place. Long, deep-cushioned divans were at each end and were covered in tapestry of small flowers on a deep green ground; each of these couches unfolded to make comfortable, full-sized beds. Above them were bunks, which folded up against the roof and out of sight during the day.

Beside the door was a small sink, cabinet base, stove and

refrigerator with many drawers and cupboards arranged compactly. Across the narrow aisle from the "kitchen" section was a breakfast table with benches at either end; the walls of two generous clothes closets forming the backs of the benches. This table could be lowered and the cushions arranged to make a three-quarter sized bed and there was also an upper berth above this. A combination dressing room and bath room, complete with a shower of running water was located beside the refrigerator. Thick curtains of green silk-finished rep were fastened at the walls and could be extended across the coach to divide the one large room into three separate sleeping rooms.

Zenobia Starr had purchased the big trailer from a wealthy oil broker in Tulsa less than a year ago with money she had received from the estate of an Aunt. She and her father John Starr, had planned to use it during their combined pursuits of fame and fortune—his in an oil venture near where the lunchroom stood and hers further west where, she was sure, singers were glamorized and given the chance to sing to their heart's content.

Mr. Starr, a former driller in the fields surrounding the great oil Metropolis of Tulsa, had embarked on a prospecting gamble; hoping to realize some reward for his vast knowledge of the oil resources, then to journey west in the luxurious trailer to the fabulous city of Hollywood. There his only daughter, Zenobia, could satisfy her longing to ascertain where her ambitions as a singer would take her in the city of Stars, Style, Screen and radio. He had not objected to his daughter buying the trailer when it was offered for sale at less than half price the owner had paid to have it built to his particular specifications; to be used for vacation trips by his large family. When temporary financial reverses had struck, the trailer and expensive vacations were the first items to be dispensed with.

Mr. Starr and Zenobia had discovered the convenience and adaptability of the trailer to their dual purpose. They had lived in it so he could be near the wild-cat drilling operations until Zenobia saw the possibilities of moving a small building, which stood empty just two miles back on the highway, to its present location and establishing a lunchroom.

The Starr lunchroom was handy for the hundreds of travelers who passed daily in each direction on the highway. Its smooth, shiny surface stretched like a gray, rippling ribbon from Los Angeles to Chicago. She had purposely selected

the site across from Hills' Service Station, for she was business woman enough to realize that motorists who might stop for gas and other supplies would be likely to avail themselves of food during the pause, if it was anywhere near a mealtime, or if they desired a between-meal snack.

Hi had soon discovered that the combination worked in his favor also; for many folks who stopped for food replenished their oil and gas before they proceeded in their journeys. The little eating place boasted only twelve stools along one side of the front room of the building; but no customers had yet been turned away or required to wait for lack of room. Zenobia's experience in school cafeterias where she had helped to pay her way through High School and Junior College, had given her valuable training in preparing and serving food; and her willingness to work long hours, her pleasant manner in meeting the public and her undiminished ambitions, combined to make the Starr lunchroom a satisfactory success during the past six months.

Each successive failure in her father's attempt to "strike it rich" in black gold, gave her a deeper appreciation of a steady and sure income of moderate means. After the last of his savings had disappeared in mistaken locations, crooked holes which had to be abandoned, strings of tools that were hopelessly lost and broken machinery, she continued to hope, for her father's sake, that he would soon emerge from the endless streak of bad luck. It had continued to dog his attempts to locate and produce that elusive black substance which he felt sure, lay in generous quantities only a matter of feet below the surface of the earth where Mother Nature had placed it in safe keeping. He believed it to be there waiting for him to tap it and bring it forth and send it on its way to the refineries and factories.

Zenobia admired his tenacious courage and determination to continue the search so long as new means appeared to finance the undertaking. She gladly admitted that she had inherited much of his will-power and steadfastness of purpose. Her faith in him never wavered when he was obliged to sell the new sedan which he had purchased, to pull the big trailer west in search of fame for his daughter—after he had made a fortune in oil or had definite promises of financial returns for his time and outlay of expenses. Patiently she had only smiled when he arranged for a mortgage of every cent he could borrow on the lunchroom; in fact she heartily approved of the deal and was prepared to sell her

house trailer should he require the few hundreds of dollars she could get for it. "Why I can go to Hollywood on the bus!" she had remarked as she waited for news about the new drilling operations a mile and a half from the lunchroom. The news that her father had died suddenly of a heart attack while standing by and helping out in any way he could, literally sent her reeling backwards in her heart-broken disappointment. He had died while still hoping that he had faced his last disappointing test and that at last, he could relax and enjoy the fruits of his labors. Soon would be able to take his daughter west and remain with her until she was established as a professional singer, or was discouraged enough to return with him and they would travel, build a new home in Tulsa among their friends—or they might take a trip to Europe. However, Fate or an overworked heart, or both had intervened and he never knew that his last effort was also a failure!

Less than a week ago, Zenobia had taken the body of her father to Tulsa for burial beside her mother, who had preceded him by three years. She had made a valiant effort to keep the knowledge of his failures and her desperate plight from her Aunt and Uncle or their closest friends; and had declined the generous offer of her mother's sister and her husband, that she return and share their modest home. An investigation of her father's papers disclosed the fact that he had borrowed money on one insurance policy, which would have paid her five thousand dollars, but another one for fifteen hundred dollars, on which there was no loan value, paid his funeral expenses and took care of a few small debts he had left in Tulsa.

After disposing of his clothing to a welfare organization, as he had requested her to do in case of death, she assured her Aunt that urgent business made it necessary for her to return at once. She left without anyone suspecting that the business which required her immediate attention was only a tiny lunchroom and that it was mortgaged for its full value!

Zenobia sat before the little combination desk and dressing table at the side of the trailer opposite the door. A myriad of important thoughts passed through her mind—some passed to be forgotten, while others were set aside for further consideration at a more favorable time. She studied the serious reflection in the small mirror which was framed by a background of green formed by the folds of the wide

partition curtain which was pushed back into one thick pillar beside the desk. Could the young artist who had sketched her profile on the bus, have seen her now, he would undoubtedly have tried to capture the alluring green tint which the color of the curtains cast into her large grey eyes. Had he seen her remove the little black hat with the filmy veil, he would have found in this picture in the mirror the personification of his visionary "dream girl".

The picture she saw mirrored in the glass was not what Zenobia saw in her mind. She was giving her surroundings, her financial position and the promises and possibilities of her future a minute mental inspection. Speaking to her reflection in an almost audible whisper, she said:

"Well, Zenobia Starr, you'll have to make some immediate changes in your plans, do some hard work or just—just—NO! I will *not* settle down to "for better or for worse" married life until I'm thoroughly convinced that I love the guy enough to completely forget my ambitions and "forsaking all others", live only for him! There's a lot of work to do in that lunch room. I know that Tony and Lupe must be worn out after a week of working practically around the clock in the place!"

She quickly removed the black suit, brushed it and hung it in the closet, then took a quick shower and slipped into a crisply starched green and white checked waitresses' uniform. It had a white collar which framed her face very becomingly and stiff cuffs which encircled her arms half way between the shoulder and elbow. Her shapely feet were soon encased in white leather oxfords with thick rubber soles. Then she unpinned the two heavy braids of hair, brushed a few short strands from her brow and neck, pinned them securely in a coronet above her brow. After applying her powder puff and a tiny bit of lipstick, she left the trailer and entered the nearby door to the lunchroom kitchen.

"Hello Lupe!" she greeted the middle aged Mexican woman who was busy making the top crusts for a half dozen pies which were piled high with thinly sliced apples. At the other end of the table where she worked, were six delicately browned cocoanut pies. The woman's dark eyes brightened with a friendly smile as she looked up and replied:

"Buenos dias Señorita Zenobia! Mucho gusto en verle—mucho happy you back!"

"I'm glad to be back Lupe. I returned just as soon as I

could. I knew that you and Tony must be having a difficult time doing the cooking and waiting on the customers too. Did they keep you very busy?"

"Si, si! Me mucho sorry you loose you papa; but me an' my Tony we mucho glad, what you say, *help out* cuando quiera!"

"Thank you Lupe! I'm very grateful to both of you. Oh, I see you have plenty of individual chicken pies for today's trade!" she said, as she counted the rows of little brown earthenware dishes that were filled with creamed chicken and topped with grated cheese and tiny little fluffy biscuits. The kitchen with the large stove, long work table, big white refrigerator and the shelves of supplies, was clean, neat and as well-stocked as it was when she left. The blue checked linoleum had been recently mopped and the garbage pail was clean and free from odors. Zenobia was pleased with that portion of the building. She smiled, patted Lupe's shoulder then passed through the swinging door to the front of the building where Tony, wearing a spotlessly clean white apron fastened about his bulging waistline, was measuring coffee into the three sparkling glass coffee-makers near the hot plate.

Well Tony, your wife tells me the hungry travelers have kept you very busy while I was away!"

"Si, si, Señorita! Many people stop to eat! Business has been ver-ee good!" he replied; replacing the lid on one large can of coffee, then picking up a similar can and glancing out of the glass panel of the door to first make sure that no customers were likely to enter, he removed the lid from the bright red can and showed her the contents. There, done in neat sheafs, with rubber bands around them, were separate bunches of one, five, ten and a few twenty dollar bills—the total receipts of the last week's business. Tony knew to a penny how much the can contained; and Zenobia was surprised and pleased to know that during her absence business at the little eating place had proceeded as usual. There had been no losses—thanks to the honest and efficient efforts of her two faithful helpers.

"Thanks again Tony! I can't begin to tell you how much your help has meant to me. I want both you and your wife to have an extra weeks pay as a—well, as a sort of bonus to show my appreciation. I wish it could be more but—well, you understand!"

"Si, si! We understand Señorita your poor papa have big loss—you have big loss—me an' my Lupe, we not want extra pay. We like to be what you Americanos call "good neighbors", we glad to help Señorita all we can!"

"Bless you both! You have been wonderful to me and there will always remain a warm spot in my heart just for you!" Zenobia said and she finally persuaded each of them to accept an extra week's pay.

She took the overnite bag and her long black coat, which Tony had placed on a chair, out to the house trailer, hung the coat in the closet, emptied the contents from the bag and placed it on a shelf. Next, she gathered up a few pieces of lingerie and several pairs of hose and placed them in the little flowered laundry bag where they would be handy for her to rinse out during the mid-afternoon lull in business. After that she returned to the lunchroom to take charge of the place while Tony and Lupe got some much needed rest.

Two men, who had just stopped for a hasty breakfast of hotcakes and coffee, had just left when Zenobia glanced out the front window and saw Hi Hills make change for a truck driver who had stopped for gas. The hands on the round, white clock near the kitchen door pointed to seven thirty-two—the time when Hi usually came to get his coffee, unless there was urgent business at the service station.

When he emerged from the door of the washroom at the rear of the station building and started across the highway, with clean hands but still wearing a smudge of grease across his forehead, she knew that he was coming for more than the usual cup of coffee—or even bacon and eggs and toast, and she was not ready and did not wish to answer the question he was sure to ask her.

Chapter Two

DIM REALITIES AMID BRIGHT HOPES

"HELLO ZENOBIA!" Hiram called cheerfully as he entered the lunchroom where she was arranging cuts of freshly baked pies in the case and the aroma of coffee, pancakes, sausages and other taste-tempting odors filled the air. "Gee honey, I was so sleepy when you came up and told me there

was a customer with a flat tire, that I can't remember whether I told you how glad I am that you are back again. But you know that without me saying so, don't you?"

"Yes Hi—I understand! You have been so very thoughtful and helpful to Dad and me!" she replied, as she poured a cup of coffee and placed it before him. Her eyes met his in a brief glance; but that fleeting glance revealed nothing of what was uppermost in her mind. He took the menu from her hand and pointed with a forefinger which bore traces of grease under the jagged nail, and a fresh plaster on the knuckle where he had barked it when the wrench had slipped off a nut while replacing the flat tire, as he looked up into the face of the pretty girl in the becoming green checked dress. Resisting the temptation to blurt out the words that filled his heart and mind, he said instead:

"Seems like you have been gone a month at least instead of only a week! Gee 'Nobia, I hate to even think what this particular spot would be like with you away and not coming back!"

"Well it looks as if I was stuck here, for a while at least," she replied, as she placed the food before him, then poured a cup of coffee for herself, placed it and a plate of buttered toast before the stool next to his left, then walked around the end of the counter and sat down beside him to eat her breakfast—as she had done many times before. After a sip of coffee, she continued: "Yes Hi, it appears as if Fate had decreed that I remain here; for here I am, with a big house trailer, with no car to pull it, and a lunchroom that is hopelessly mortgaged. I've been wondering whether I'm supposed to devise some means of getting my trailer moved and go on, or try to stay here and pay off the mortgage. I can't very well accomplish both at once; at least not until I've reached a staid middle-age and my voice sounds like a hungry calf bawling for its milk after it has been weaned—but still, Tony and Lupe did remarkably well last week. Perhaps this week will be as good and the following weeks still better!"

"Haven't you even a teeny-weeny thought about us getting married?" He asked wearily.

"Yes Hi, I've thought a lot about that ever since you first asked me a few weeks ago; but no matter from which angle I approach the subject, the answer always comes out the same!"

"Just a great big *NO*, is that it?" He sighed.

"It isn't as simple as that. If I didn't admire you a lot and love you—well, at least a little, I could give you a prompt and final *no* and forget you but—Oh, darn it Hi! those ambitions of mine have me all tangled up like a kitten in a ball of yarn! I can't put certain things out of my mind enough to allow my feelings for you to occupy it completely—and until I can do just that, I'm not going to marry you—or anyone else!"

Hi sat looking at the cup he held in his hand; then after a brief silence, he said:

"Nobia, honey, I appreciate your being honest with me—that makes me love you all the more. I understand your feelings better than you think. Why, when I was in the Navy, I spent what few spare moments I had in dreaming of operating a service station all of my own. I know what it means to want something; that's why I'm willing to go all the way in helping you get what you want. I love you so much that I'd do almost anything to help you realize your ambitions!"

"Hi, you're sweet!" she said patting his hand, "but those who are supposed to know, say that marriage and true love is a fifty-fifty proposition; so I wouldn't want you to cast aside all your plans in order to see if we can make my scatterbrained ideas materialize. No, I still believe there is a plausible solution to this big and unusual puzzle; and if we try real hard and have faith in each other and lots of patience, that we'll overcome everything in due time!"

"I suppose you're right; but right now, *patience* is one thing I don't have much of. Honey I can't be calm, patient or even think straight when I'm so concerned about you being left here in such an unconventional situation. Why it just isn't right or proper for an attractive girl of your age to be stranded away out here at the roadside, with the nearest town six miles away on one side and three miles on the other, in a public eating place with a heavy mortgage hanging like loadstone over it—no companion, no chaperone—aw heck! I guess I'm old fashioned when it comes to such things; but I don't like it!"

"Well, I don't *like* the idea of being out here without anyone older. When Dad was here, that was one worry that I didn't have, but I've made up my mind that a girl can be decent and self-respecting when she is alone just as well as when she is sheltered by parents, grandparents and aunts and uncles—that is, if she *really* wants to be!"

"Yes Zenobia, I understand and I'm sure that you are

quite capable of taking care of yourself any time or under any circumstances, it's just that I don't want even a finger of suspicion pointed your way. I don't want the gossips to have a thing that they can wag their tongues about!"

She laughed at his blunt way of expressing his mind and said:

"Put your mind at ease Hi. You really haven't that latter fear to worry about. You see, this immediate community is composed of only four people, Tony, his wife, you and me!"

"Yes that's true; but Highway 66 is a busy place and this is a small world when you stop to think how quickly one can travel from one distant place to another. It would require only a few hours' time for some of your relatives, friends or acquaintances from Tulsa to drive by and discover you here. Please forgive me if I appear unduly pessimistic, it's just because I love you, that I mention these things. I don't want anything to happen to you—nothing that could cause you grief or regrets!"

"Thank you Hi for your concern—and especially for your love. That is one reason why I do not want to marry you right now. Not that I'm afraid that I would encounter heartaches by doing so, I don't view marriage that way. I believe that marriage could, and should offer perfect happiness—the next thing to Heaven on earth, if we don't rush blindly into it with cobwebs of ambitions woven across our eyes, and unsprouted seeds of accomplishments in our hearts. We should brush the straws of self and the dust of conceit from our hair and clothes and start out on that all-important phase of our lives fresh and clean; then we can remain that way and establish a wholesome place in which to raise our children!"

"You make it sound so—well, so reasonable and idealistic the mist seems to clear away—then when I stop to consider, I find that we are faced with stark realities and I'm then more befuddled than ever!"

"I'm not afraid of *real* things Hi! When we can see a problem, we can face it squarely and work out a solution. It's the unseen, the hidden things that trip us or knock us off balance every now and then!" Zenobia explained. Hi finished his cakes and sausages and sipped his coffee in silence; then suddenly he turned to her and said:

"I've been thinking Zenobia, that house trailer is more or less of a 'white elephant' to you now, and since you won't

marry me and let me do the worrying, why don't you sell it and pay off the mortgage on the lunchroom. Then rent it so long as it is a paying proposition. Or else let the lunchroom go and take what money you can get for the trailer, get on a bus or train, go on to Hollywood or wherever you wish to get started with your singing. Business at the service station is good now and promises to get better. I can send you enough money to live on while you are studying. I'm sure it must cost a lot for a girl to live out there, what with rent on a decent apartment and the right kind of clothes to wear to the places you would need to appear. Honey, won't you let me do that much for you? I give you my solemn word that there will be no strings of any sort—no demand that you marry me or that you repay a penny of it! Knowing how anxious you are to use that sweet voice of yours to entertain others and what the odds are in your favor, once you are given a chance, I would be glad to do whatever I can to give you a start. Even if I didn't love you more than anything or anyone in the world, I would still make the offer in good faith!"

With a sweet impulsiveness, Zenobia leaned over and looking into his troubled eyes, she slowly shook her head, then kissed him on the cheek and replied:

"No Hi—you darling! I can't let you do that. To begin with, I am *not* selling my house trailer! So far as I know right now, I'll keep this lunchroom so long as it clears a few dollars per week. I hope business will pick up and I can save enough to buy a car with which to pull the trailer west; and when I do, I'll carry the memory of your generous offer in my mind and it will be like the voice of a canary in a cage that will cheer me up when I'm discouraged. I'll wager that there are few girls who are cheered by the memory of such a swell fellow as you!"

"Well," he sighed, "I guess there isn't anything more that I can say. Yes there is, honey. If by any chance you should change your mind and plans, don't hesitate to tell me. I'll be waiting for you. If you think you would care to take a chance of finding happiness as my wife and living out here in this lonely place, I will have that little three-room cottage that was left standing alone when this building was moved, brought up here, stick on some new wallpaper, smear on some fresh paint and buy some furniture, so you can have a decent place to live and—"

"There's a customer stopping for gas Hi."

"O.K., I'll see you at lunch time; and in the meantime, you think over what I have said and then do as you think best. Whatever you decide will be agreeable with me—but I hope that little house will be moved up here under those oak trees to the right of the service station. So long honey!"

"So long Hi—see you at lunch!" Zenobia called; then she sat for a few moments, looking out at the passing of an occasional passenger car or truck as they passed in either direction; but it seemed to her that there was more traffic headed west on Highway 66 than those going to eastern destinations. The early morning sun glistened on new sedans and station wagons as they passed between the Starr lunchroom and the Hills service station. She wondered where all the people in them were going. Perhaps some were going to attend a wedding like those in the car with the flat tire. Some might be hurrying to the bedside of a sick or a dying relative—to a family reunion—to school or college. Many of them were doubtless on their way to new jobs or occupations—new surroundings where they would be happier. She felt sure that the majority of the latter were going west where there was more room, better opportunities and new advances. It made her a bit jealous of these fortunate ones; and she longed to join the migration. Her wild imagination gave her inspiration for one of the impromptu, quickly composed songs which had burst forth, unpractised and unarrayed, from her pretty lips on many occasions since she was a little girl in pigtails and pinafores. It was then she had discovered that she liked to sing.

Zenobia made a habit of humming snatches of numerous tunes until she struck one which fit into the various moods which clamored for complete control of her mind. Just now grief over the recent death of her father, worry over money matters and tempered by the desires which burned incessantly within her, she began to sway gently and, making up the words as she went, she sang softly:

"Follow the sun and you can't go wrong,
Keep in step the whole day long,
Up and ready at the break of day
You have a leader while on your way.
Follow the sun with its warmth and light,
You can't go wrong, you'll sure go right!"

The words died away but she continued to hum the tune as she watched the vehicles on the highway. Both the traffic and the elements seemed to beckon her westward. During the twenty years of her life, most of which had been spent in the thriving metropolis of Tulsa, she had never been farther west than she was now. Judging from her present position and circumstances, she told herself that there were three entirely different escapes for her to choose from. She could dispose of the small business and the trailer and return to Tulsa, join her aunt's household and take any of the three jobs that had been offered her. She could marry Hi and help him—awaken him of mornings so he could profit by the early morning trade—or she could follow the sun to the very place where it bid good night to her home; and before it awakened other people in foreign lands. To her, the sun was much brighter and more promising when it dipped over the crest of the mountain range in the west in late afternoon, than it was when it appeared in the east, like a sleepy eye just opening in the morning.

Both Zenobia and Hi were too busy that day to spend much time together. She took full charge of the kitchen as well as the counter for two hours during the midmorning and again from two till four in the afternoon, in order to give Tony and his wife time to rest and to attend to things at their little home, which was located in one corner of a farm just around a low hill to the north.

Hi was so busy at the service station that he did not find time to go across the highway and eat lunch. During three attempts to rush over and snatch a cup of coffee, a sandwich and perhaps have a few words with Zenobia, he was interrupted just as he had finished washing the grease and grime from his hands and started across the highway. The first time, by a tourist who wanted information and air in all four tires, then by a party of two cars headed for Amarillo, who wanted gasoline, and finally by a steaming and sputtering car and driver, the former with a broken fan belt and the latter with a frayed temper.

Zenobia had noticed each time that Hi had been frustrated in his attempts to get some food. Knowing that eating was one of his favorite pastimes, one which came before betting on race horses or playing golf, she prepared a thick steak sandwich, a stack of potato chips, a double-sized piece of cocoanut pie and a pot of coffee and carried the tray over and placed it on the little counter beside the cash register.

Just then Hi finished putting in new spark plugs in a car that was so old that the new spark plugs looked entirely out of place in it.

Forgetting the grease that streaked his face, where he had attempted to wipe away perspiration with a dirty hand or an equally dirty sleeve, he was in the act of clasping her in his arms, giving her a hug and perhaps a kiss for her thoughtfulness in bringing food to him, when she backed away and said:

"Oh no Hi! Don't touch me—this is the last clean uniform I have ironed—besides, I don't have time to change now!" Kissing her fingertips, she reached out and touched a clean spot on his cheek. He paused abruptly and, looking at his grease covered hands and clothes, then making a funny grimace when he tried to smile with the queer shaped smudges on his face, he said:

"Gee, I am a mess aren't I! Aw 'Nobia, honest honey, you're the sweetest girl in the world; and I'm starved, almost to exhaustion! Oh boy! my favorite steak sandwich and cocoanut pie—yum—yum! Thanks a million honey—perhaps I can do something nice for you some day!—but right now, I'm going to wash my hands—for the umpteenth time and when I do get this nasty stuff off my hands again I'm going to eat this food if customers line up ten deep while I'm at it!"

She flashed him a smile from the doorway, then rushed back to serve dessert to three customers whom she had left eating their pork chops and French fried potatoes. During the afternoon, she found time to rinse out her lingerie and to iron three of the green and white checked uniforms. By the time she went to bed in the big tandem at eleven fifteen that evening, she was both mentally and physically exhausted. She turned the Venetian blind on the window at the rear of the coach and saw Hi working feverishly on the car that had crept up to the station two hours ago, with complicated mechanical troubles. "Poor Hi, he'll probably be in as bad shape as that motor is before he retires!" she said, then stretched out on the big soft, extended davenport and was soon fast asleep.

It seemed only a few minutes instead of nearly seven hours, before she was awakened by the frantic tooting of an automobile horn. After two pauses, she raised up and peered out beneath the lowered shade and saw a truck, loaded with coops of chickens, mostly big fat fryers, stand-

ing beside the pumps. The driver was demanding gasoline with which to get his poultry to market on time. The short, rough-clad, bewhiskered little man alternated in reading the sign on the front of the station which announced open hours between six a.m. and eleven-thirty p.m.—with emergency service any time between, and pressing on the button which sent forth a lusty bellow that sent chills up the spines of those listening and set the chickens to cackling and fluttering. For the third time, the driver pulled a heavy gold watch from his vest pocket by a piece of leather thong, looked at it, placed the timepiece against his ear to make sure it had not stopped, then jabbed viciously at the horn button.

Zenobia realized how useless it was to expect the mere honking of an automobile horn, even right under his bedroom window, to awaken Hi, so she flung the covers aside, slipped out of the flimsy night gown and into the uniform she had worn the previous day. Then stepping into a pair of sandals, she ran across the highway and told the driver of the truck that she would arouse the station attendant. She ran up the stairs and through the open door. Hi had not taken time to change clothes or to remove the soiled white coveralls with the words: "HILLS SERVICE STATION" in red letters across the back. He lay in complete repose on the narrow army cot. He had kicked off the heavy work shoes and they lay on the floor beside the couch; and near them, sat the canvas bag containing the last week's receipts! Bending over him, Zenobia said:

"Come on! Wake up Hi! There's a truck that needs gasoline. Come on, the man's in a hurry to get to market!"

There was a deep chortle then a shrill snicker from the man on the cot; then he mumbled:

"Yeah, that was a good one; but did you ever hear the one about what the farmer's daughter told the traveling salesman?"

"Hi!" Zenobia scolded, as she suddenly realized that Hi was telling one of his prize stories in his sleep. She knew that he had a story to fit any occasion, but from the tones he used, she was positive that this one was not intended—well, not for her, so she said:

"Just a moment, sir, there's ladies present!"

He laughed again at whatever it was he had dreamed about and mumbled:

"I heard that one on a golf course some time ago— isn't it a p-i-p-p!" Then his words trailed off into a weary groan and he began to breathe evenly as he relapsed into a deep, dream-free slumber.

Zenobia shook her head in despair, then smiled as compassionately as a fond mother over the form of a sleepy-headed, though favorite son. Snatching up the money bag from the floor and the keys to the supply room and the pumps, where they lay on the box, she ran down the steps, unlocked the door, then the pump, and filled the tank for the sorely vexed driver. He happened to have the correct change ready and she did not have to open the door and returned to her trailer, where she intended to take a bath and dress for work at the counter. She had scarcely entered the trailer when another horn sounded from across the highway and she returned to give some directions to a motorist who had lost his way.

Twenty minutes later, when dressed in a fresh uniform and busily arranging the menu for the day, she glanced out the front window, then smiled mischievously, when she saw Hi, with disheveled hair and shoe laces dangling, emerge from the door of the sleeping quarters above the service station and race down the steps two at a time. She watched as he ran around and shook the door to the lower room furiously—peered through the glass panel in the door, then turn and begin to search frantically through the many pockets of the voluminous white coveralls. He tried all three pumps and found them unlocked and, like one stung by a wasp, he began checking the supply of gasoline to see whether or not any was left. Relaxing a bit when he made sure that the storage tanks were not empty, as he had feared, he patted all of his pockets again to see if, by any chance, he had overlooked the keys. Still fearing that the worst had happened, he raced around to the men's rest room, then to the ladies, to see if by chance, he had left the bag of money and the keys in either place when he hurriedly inspected them for articles overlooked by motorists, before he went to bed, after completing repairs on the car shortly after midnight. He bumped against two locked doors, hesitated a moment, then ran back upstairs to the room that he had hastily, though thoroughly searched, before he left it a few minutes ago.

Zenobia watched intently then, deciding that he had been

punished enough for his carelessness, prepared to call to him just as soon as an early customer had finished his coffee and doughnuts; but Hi entered the lunchroom before the customer left. He walked to the stool at the far end of the counter and slumped down—his dirty chin resting on a still dirtier fist as he stared gloomily into space. He was too absorbed in his distressing thoughts to reply to the friendly and cheerful, "Good morning Hi!" from Zenobia as she placed a cup of steaming coffee before him, before making change for her customer and exchanging a few friendly words as he left by the front door. She returned to the miserable looking Hi and leaning over the counter, she teasingly ran the tip of her forefinger along the swayed ridge of his nose. He had once jokingly told her that was caused by his mother being frightened by a sway-backed mare before he was born. He ignored the touch of her finger and continued to stare gloomily at the blank space of wall opposite him.

"Drink your coffee Hi. It may clear your mind and help you remember!" she said sweetly.

"Think nothing! Miss Starr, do you know what a calamity happened to me last night?" he snapped, with frigid formality.

"Well, whatever it was, it isn't nearly so bad as you think—or as terrible as it *might* have been!"

"NO? Well maybe you think so; but let me tell you it is no fun to discover that you have been robbed!" he replied as he pounded his fist on the counter.

"Robbed? What was you robbed of?" she queried in a tone which should have tipped him to the fact that she knew all about the loss, had he not been in such a down-cast, "it's-all-over" mood.

"Of my money—every penny that I took in the past week and some that I had saved to pay for supplies. Besides all of my keys are gone. Why I'll have to bust open all the doors, including those to the rest rooms. The culprit very obligingly left the pumps unlocked and enough gasoline in them for me to drive Sylvia into town to get new locks!"

"Hi, just where did you leave your money and keys?"

"Why I left them on the floor beside my bed; where I could hear anyone who might try to steal them. That is, I *think* I did!" he said, trying to be honest; for he had been so tired and sleepy when he flung himself on the cot, that he

wasn't sure just where he had left them. "Did you hear any unusual noises during the night 'Nobia?"

"No-o, not until this morning about daylight, when the driver of a poultry truck awakened me honking for gas, and again when I went up to awaken you and you started telling the story about what the farmer's daughter told the trav—"

"Zenobia! Did I tell *that* story to—to you?" He asked, his face turning a livid red which was dotted by smudges of grease and dust; and squirming as though he might suddenly dash out the door and keep on running.

"Not all of it; you became so amused at your story that you began to laugh, then when that became too exerting, you went sound asleep again."

"Whew!" he sighed with relief, then shaking his head and resuming his gloomy misgivings, he stated, as a mere expression of a foregone conclusion. "And you noticed that the money and the keys were gone when you was up there?"

In reply to his statement, she turned around and picked up the big red coffee can, like the one in which Tony had placed her cash for safekeeping, removed the lid and drew the poke containing Hi's cash and the cluster of jangling keys from the can. Placing them on the counter before him, she asked:

"Is *this* the bag of money and the keys that you thought were stolen?"

"Aw 'Nobia! What a scare you gave me!" he exclaimed in boyish delight as he clasped his hands over the supposedly lost articles.

"I've warned you that someone could walk away with everything in that room. Why the way you sleep, Hi, a real thief could slip that cot from under you and be miles away before you woke up or discovered that it was missing! I'm sorry to have caused you so much worry; but I only wanted to teach you a lesson—just in case I'm not always here to awaken you!"

"Now honey, don't you dare to even hint that you are leaving. You—but then I wouldn't blame you one bit if you did—I'm such a sleepy-headed cuss; and I know you would be better off without me to worry about!"

"Don't say such things Hiram Hills! They not only sound terrible; but they do not apply to the circumstances which exist here!"

"But 'Nobia! What would this place be like without you?" he demanded.

"Why Hi, you selected this as a place to operate a gas station without knowing that I would be here; and you were getting along very well when Daddy and I arrived!"

"Please honey, don't make me argue or try to explain—I'm no good at explaining. The more I say the more confused everyone gets!"

"Very well, let's not discuss my presence or absence; but, for Heaven's sake Hi, do be more careful with your money, keys and everything! Nail those loose hinges on that wabby door and put a good lock on it—and then use it! Then hide your money, even if you have to stuff it into your shoes and cover it up with your socks—or at least place the money and keys under your pillow!"

"All right, I'll do as you say!" he promised and left suddenly when he heard a customer honking for service.

Two days of business at the Starr lunchroom and Hills service station passed without any incidents which might tend to make life more interesting or dull for Zenobia and Hi; or to bring her any nearer a solution to her difficult problems. In the meantime, Hi had kept his promise to mend the door to his sleeping quarters, and a shiny new brass lock now adorned the weatherbeaten door. For two succeeding mornings, he had awakened of his own accord and had opened the station at six o'clock; but on the third morning an early customer began a steady beep! beep! on his horn and kept it up until Zenobia got dressed and went over to see if she could arouse him. She asked the cross looking driver to wait while she went up the stairs and tried to awaken him, with the locked door between them. She began pounding, then she pushed, but he had done a good job of fastening the hinges and the new lock held it as securely as if it had been nailed solidly to the walls.

After she had alternately knocked and called to him for a period of at least two minutes, the driver stuck his head out the window of his car and snapped:

"Tell that guy if he is too sleepy-headed to attend to business, I'll go elsewhere for my gas and oil!" Then mumbling something about him probably being out late carousing or hanging over the gate with his girl friend, he slammed the car into gear and rattled away in disgust.

Zenobia continued to call, then she slipped off one of her

shoes and began mauling on the door with the heel. Still no reply from within the quiet room.

"I wonder if I'm going to have to smoke him out!" she said, as she paused to try to think of something else to do to awaken him. "If I could only throw some cold water in his face, perhaps that would arouse him; but I can't throw water through that door!"

She walked half way down the stairs to where she could almost reach the beams which held up the small, square, flat roof over the driveway to the pumps. Then she remembered having seen Hi climbing up there to fix the roof after a high wind had loosened the tarpaper covering. He had used a short ladder; so, deciding on a plan that amused her, she walked around to the far side of the building and got the ladder from where he had placed it on the ground. She carried the crudely constructed ladder around and placed it against the side of the wall, just under the beam as she had seen him using it. Filling an empty tomato can with water from the faucet — which was quite cold from the chilly autumn weather, and looking up and down the highway to make sure that no one was coming, she clutched the can of water in one hand while she balanced herself with the other as she climbed gingerly up the steps of the wobbly ladder and stepped onto the black surfaced roof. Then she walked over to one of the open windows, straddled the sill, entered the room and paused when the sleeping man waved one arm in the air and called "Fore!"

"So! He's enjoying a game of golf! That's the reason he can't be bothered about cars running out of gasoline! Well, I've heard that a shower usually ends a game on the links, no matter how exciting it is, so here's a bit of shower right on the most interesting spot of his particular game!" She dashed the contents of the can in the direction of Hi's head. The gaudy colored blanket received most of it; but enough struck his face to bring him almost to his feet with the blanket tangled about his waist and one leg. He shivered, spluttered and moaned. She began to laugh and remarked:

"Hi Hills, how did they ever manage to awaken you while you were in the Navy? Did they have to lower you over the side of the ship and dunk you three times to get you to open your eyes and stand at attention?"

The sight of the girl standing before him, sent him into a frenzied attempt to keep the blanket draped about him, and

to refrain from saying the things that popped into his mind as he tried to wipe the water from his face and neck. He finally gasped:

"I never got sound sleep all the time I was in the Navy—that's why I'm so all-fired sleepy headed now—just trying to catch up with what I lost during those hectic years!" Then after a glance at the door, he continued: "Say! I locked that door like you told me to do—and I hid my money in one shoe and the keys in the other, see!" and he pushed the shoes toward her with one bare foot as he asked: "But 'Nobia *how* did you get into this room?"

"Through the window!"

"You didn't!"

"Oh but I did! See for yourself—there's the ladder." Gathering the ends of the bulging drape about him, Hi sprinted over the dusty floor to the window, thrust his head out, looked at the ladder leaning against the wall and at the tracks on the roof top. After looking about and seeing no other car except his own Sylvia, he drew in his head and facing her, he exploded:

"Well, sardines t' sidesaddles! Who sent you up here? There's not a car in sight and I don't see anyone with a pail in his hands!"

"He's gone—but he said to tell you 'PFITT!' if you couldn't wake up and sell him some gas!" she said as she walked to the door and turned the round knob which released the lock. As she paused in the open doorway, she said: "Hi, that was a dirty trick to play on you; but when my advice to lock your door sort of backfired on me, I was too stubborn to go on back home and mind my own business and let Nature take it's course in awakening you. You aren't very mad at me are you?"

"Naw! But if anyone but you had done that, I'd have picked them up and tossed them out that window. But—well, *you're* different! No honey I'm not mad—I think it was a darned cute trick!"

She smiled, blew him a kiss, then raced down the stairs to wait on a customer who had just stopped at the lunchroom.

Dressed in a clean white mechanic's uniform and wearing a happy smile, Hi came in for breakfast a few minutes later. His benign appearance belied the heavy burden and the growing uncertainty which kept gnawing at him every moment of his waking hours. He realized that Zenobia let her

glittering ambitions and self-confidence carry her far beyond her present troubles. This ambition, or stubbornness as he termed it, often exasperated him almost to distraction. It was this milling over her present plight and future fortunes or misfortunes, that had kept him awake so late last night that he was unable to awaken at the proper time this morning! He toyed with the menu until the pair of customers paid their bills and left. Then he ordered his hot cakes and coffee, and when Zenobia sat down beside him to eat her toast and coffee, he turned to her and said in tones of mixed impatience and sincerity:

"Aw 'Nobia, have a heart! There's no use in us going on like this. Let's get married and—why if we were married, you wouldn't have to shinny up that ladder in order to awaken me!"

"Now Hi, I thought we'd settled that question—for the time being at least! To be brutally frank with you, I like you a lot; but I don't think that I'm in love with you. If I was, if I loved you like I should and was to marry you and accept the protection you offer, I would be willing to forget my ambitions!"

"And you don't love me like that?"

She shook her head; but as her eyes met his, he wondered. He felt that there was some doubt in her mind. As for him, well his mind was still running in a true course, the same unaltered path which would keep him beside her. With a pleading note in his voice he said:

"Events and circumstances might have prevented you from following the natural dictates of your heart. Your generous and unselfish nature made you consider your father's plans first, and now you are no doubt letting ambitions crowd your natural impulses into the background. Just say that you'll marry me, that you'll let me carry all your burdens and solve all your problems, except waking me up in the morning, and I'll bet you will soon forget about one career and be making such a splendid success of another—the one that is most suited and so sweetly becoming to women the world over!"

"No Hi! I'm sorry if I seem stubborn or unappreciative of your interest in me; but if I quit now, I'd never be satisfied with you or anyone else—not even myself!" Zenobia replied, honestly wishing that she could say something that would not cause that hurt look in his eyes.

"But you just *can't* go on like this—why you're practically

at the end now!" Hi insisted doggedly as she arose and snatched the empty dishes from before him and began stacking them. She glanced out the big front window and said.

"Run along like a good boy. See, there's a customer at your station!"

"Aw hang the customers!" he said; and took his time in walking across the highway to where a big shiny blue coupe stood beside the grease rack. "Someone *would* have to develop car trouble just when I was started on a well-thought-out campaign to change Zenobia's plans!" Many a disturbing thought passed through his mind during the few seconds required for him to cross the three lane highway. What if she didn't change her mind? What if her plans went amiss—as plans often do? What if the lunchroom was taken from her? What if she should finally consent to sell the house trailer and then go away, either back to Tulsa or go west where she would be among total strangers and become engaged in the battle for recognition where, according to many reports, no holds are barred? What if he should never see her again? That thought struck him a sickening blow, for he just couldn't bear to even contemplate what the future would be like with Zenobia Starr entirely out of his life. He grunted something which sounded like "good morning" to the driver of the blue coupe; although he considered it anything but a good morning.

Zenobia watched from the window as Hi crossed the road and as the driver alighted from the car which she noted, with somewhat of a thrill, bore a California license. The stranger was not a distinguished looking person, just ordinary height and build and she guessed that he was perhaps two or three years older than Hi. Although Hi had never divulged his age to her, she classified him as being between twenty-four and twenty-eight. The driver of the California car wore a nondescript attire of loose fitting coat of numerous colors, trousers which might have been brown, grey or green, or all three colors. His hat was a casually adjusted, light brown felt with a small, bright red feather nestling in the band. He held an unlighted pipe in first his mouth, and then his hand, as he gave Hi directions for servicing his car.

The girl at the window received another thrill when the man from California turned and headed across the highway towards the tiny cafe. She was intensely interested in any-

one who came from the west—California in particular; for they seemed to bring some of the warmth of perpetual sunshine, the air of glamor and the thrill of success, such as she had pictured the Golden State abounded in—a real mecca for the beautiful, the talented and the ambitious!

She smiled and called a pleasant "Good morning Sir!" as she placed a glass of water before the stranger as he settled himself on a stool. Glancing out the window, she saw Hi bent over the open hood of the blue car, oil gauge in hand.

"Nice morning Miss," the stranger announced pleasantly.

"Yes—but I'll bet it is much nicer in California, where you came from," Zenobia said. "What'll it be sir?"

"Ham, eggs slightly over, toast and marmalade," he replied, then added, "So you noticed where my car was from. I'm sure I haven't an orange blossom in my hair!"

"I always notice license plates—it's an interesting hobby of mine; besides, it helps me pass away the time," she explained as she walked to the little window and gave the order to the cook. Returning and pausing before him, she continued: "California *must* be a wonderful place!"

"I like it very much," he replied.

"Tell me," she said, with a far away look in her eyes and a caressing softness in her voice, "is it true that the sun shines every day of the year, that there are no snows and that most everyone you see is either a famous actor, singer or a retired business man from the East?"

"Well," the man replied, with an amused smile about his mouth and a twinkle in his blue eyes, "I wouldn't say that was entirely the case—but—well, California does have—there aren't—some of the—oh well, it's a darned nice place to live!"

"I'm going there some day—real soon I hope!" she announced, as she glanced curiously at her customer. She wasn't sure of whom he reminded her. Her mind raced back over a list of persons she had seen or known while she lived in Tulsa; but not one fitted his description—it was like trying to recall the words to a hauntingly familiar melody.

"You'll like it out there I'm sure; and there is a great demand for attractive girls like you in high class cafes."

"But, you see I'm not going to be a waitress. Say Mister, haven't I seen or met you some place? Were you ever in here before?"

"No, this is my first visit to this particular locality. Perhaps—er—no, I'm sure that I merely resemble someone else—many people look alike you know!" he replied, rather confused.

"It isn't so much your looks—your face!" she insisted, with a puzzled look in her eyes, "It's your voice, your clothes, mannerisms, everything. It seems that I have seen you many times before—yet I just can't recall—O-O-OH! Now I remember! Mister, would you sing a few bars of "WHERE THE BLUE OF THE NIGHT MEETS THE GOLD OF HER HAIR?"

He grinned rather sheepishly, but kept on eating.

C h a p t e r T h r e e

MARTIN LAWRENCE—IN PERSON!

"OH PLEASE—JUST a few bars!" she pleaded. "I used to have a phonograph record of that song, but it was broken. "Please let's see if my guess is correct!" she coaxed; and before she really expected it, he looked around to make sure that he had no audience except the attractive girl, and suddenly the small room was filled with the rich, familiar tones of: "Where the b-blue of the night!" and for good measure he added: "Meets the gold of her hair!" then trailed off into a melodious crooning which sent thrills up her spine and made goose-pimples pop out on her arms.

"Martin Lawrence!" she gasped excitedly.

"At your service Miss!" he replied, smiling up at the happy girl.

"Oh, I'm so thrilled!" she exclaimed. "I have often hoped, but never expected, to meet and hear my favorite singer—especially out here in this God-forsaken place!"

"My dear young lady!" Martin Lawrence said soberly, "You would not think this place God-forsaken had you seen some of the places I have visited during the past few years. There were places where men endured limbs blown off, eyes blown out, gaping holes in bleeding bodies and all Hell breaking loose around the tent hospitals—not to mention the thousands of frightened, starving and maimed men, women and children in the battered towns, and war-scarred country side and they—"

"I'm sorry Mr. Lawrence!" Zenobia said solemnly. "I know of the splendid work you did overseas, singing for the boys. I guess I am like millions of other people in the country, I do not fully appreciate what I have, or the chances of getting more and better things!"

"I only wish that I could have done more! Our songs, jokes, nice speeches and generous promises—even the great amount of money we spent, seem so little when compared to what some of the fellows and girls contributed over there!" Mr. Lawrence said.

"That is so very true," she replied, "And I sometimes feel so ashamed of myself—just for having ambitions that appear too remote to fulfill, so entirely out of reach. But as far back as I can remember, I have wanted to be a singer—I suppose I was born with the desire and I'll probably continue to cherish dreams of success as a singer until I have proven to myself that I have no talent!"

"Oh, so you want to sing? Well I don't blame you for that!"

"More than anything I know, Mr. Lawrence! It's something inside me, something like authors and poets have often described as sufficient to withstand hunger, disappointments and many failures—like Poe, who died poor and hungry because poetry was a part of him; and Mozart, whose music will live forever. They didn't let disappointments, setbacks and serious handicaps prevent them from succeeding, from expressing that which stemmed from within them. I believe I have a much better chance in this modern day than they had. Why, with a land like ours to live in and that especially nice spot, California, to welcome ambitious people and give them a chance to act, dance or sing! Well, I can hardly wait to see what it will be like!"

"With your looks, ambitions and whatever talents you have or can acquire, you should succeed. But I warn you! there will be times when you will feel like quitting, times when there doesn't seem to be any way to proceed; but don't give up, just relax, rest a bit, get your bearings and then get up and keep climbing!" he told her in a calm, serious voice that she would never forget.

"Thanks Mr. Lawrence!" she said. "Meeting you has given me an even stronger determination to make my dreams come true?—By the way, do you have a singing engagement near here? Is that what brings you out here?"

"Not exactly an engagement," he explained. "I'm on my

way to that Veteran's hospital over there on the hill, that group of buildings you can see to the northeast. There is a chap whom I met while overseas—just after he had lost the sight of both eyes. He's having a birthday today; and several days ago, he casually mentioned to a buddy that what he wanted most for his birthday, since it is impossible to restore his sight, was to hear me sing again! It's an odd thing about these boys, miss, they never ask for, or expect the impossible. They want something that usually costs very little in time and effort to give them—like this lad's wish that he might hear me sing and just shake hands and talk to me! Why lady, I'm greatly flattered—I consider that one of the greatest compliments ever tossed my way!"

"And you drove all the way from California to grant this boy's wish?" she asked.

"It's a privilege that I'm humbly grateful for—a few minutes of pleasure for this boy will mean a lifetime of satisfaction to me! I've received letters from many patients in hospitals in various places; usually for autograph or recordings of a particular song, so I discarded the idea of flying out there to meet this boy and instead, I decided to drive. On the way here, I've visited hospitals in lower New Mexico and Texas and after my visit here, I will go on to other hospitals in Oklahoma, upper New Mexico, Nevada and Arizona, before returning to California."

"Mr. Lawrence, I think you're wonderful!" she said, as she punched the cash register.

"No, Miss, I'm just an ordinary human being trying to fill his obligations, his place in life just as the boys in our armed forces did; and do you know," he said, as he stood up and brushed a crumb from his clothes, "Every time I'm requested to sing for those boys, like tonight, I wish that I had been born a pretty girl instead of a none too handsome man. You should see how the poor bed-ridden fellows' faces light up when a pretty girl appears—she does something for them, no matter whether she can sing or not! I've seen the results when Frances Langford sang for them! Why it's like some magic wand had been waved over them! Well, I must be on my way; I have a date to visit, lunch and inspect the hospital before I sing tonight, when an orchestra from Oklahoma City will be there to aid and abet me in my feeble efforts! Thanks a million for a swell breakfast and a very interesting visit. I sincerely hope that I'll meet you as a professional singer

some day soon. I believe my car is ready, so I'll be going. So long and good luck Miss!"

"Thank you and good bye Sir!" Zenobia called; and the door closed behind the man who had given her added inspiration and new determination. She watched him cross the highway, pay Hi and drive away.

During the balance of the morning, Zenobia was mentally wrestling with an idea which was turning and twisting about in her mind. She waited on her regular customers and a few strangers in a preoccupied manner. One instant she mentally pictured herself in the California night spots, while the next instant her mind wandered to the rows of beds in the hospital on the hill less than five miles away—then to Martin Lawrence. As had been her habit since childhood, she improvised words and melodies to suit her moods. Thinking of the veterans and the glory they had earned, she hummed snatches of: "THERE'S A BRIGHT STAR SHINING ANEW", in a cheery martial mood.

A few minutes later, she hummed a melody of love, romance and ambitions fulfilled with the words: "I'VE FOUND MY RAINBOW—THERE'S FORTUNES OF LOVE, HOPE AND FAME WAITING FOR ME!" She tried to picture herself singing to the patients as Miss Langford had done. Suddenly an idea burst into her crowded mind.

"And why shouldn't *I* sing for the boys over there on the hill?" she asked herself. She dashed to the kitchen window and asked Tony the cook to wait on any customers who might happen to drop in, then dashed out to the house-trailer, the long coach on four wheels in the center, which had been her home since leaving Tulsa several months ago. From the long drawer beneath the divan at the rear of the spacious room, she removed several beautiful costumes, things she had ordered from a secondhand costume shop in New York City and had worn in skits, plays and operettas during her high school and junior college days in Tulsa. Among the lot of finery, was a creation of shimmering satin and frothy chiffon which resembled misty clouds over a silvery moon. She had worn it in an Easter Pageant. She lay it aside and replaced the others; then she held it up and admired it.

"I just *knew* that I'd have use for this gorgeous dress again sometime!" she told her reflection in the tall, closet door mirror, "and I'll keep all the others—who knows, I

might—" She did not finish saying what it was she *might* do, but took a pair of silver sandals from a box and searched among her box of hair ornaments from which she selected a pink rose. It was made of velvet and sprinkled with minute bits of crystal, to resemble dew. She straightened the leaves of the flower, brushed the shoes, hooked up the iron, pressed a few wrinkles from the full skirt of the white dress and hung it up on a hanger. The breeze from the open window fanned the chiffon folds like wafts of white vapor.

Zenobia took care of the counter at lunch time. Hi was busy at his gas station till one o'clock. When he came in for lunch both were in a mood to talk—he about marriage and she about something which did not concern marriage. She took her salad and sat down on the stool next to him. She had hardly got seated when she asked:

"Hi, do you happen to know who the man was who was driving the blue coupe this morning?"

After a moment of reflection while he chewed a huge bite of steak, Hi replied:

"The guy in the flashy clothes, a pipestem growing out of his mouth and hands that looked like he might play a fairly good game of miniature golf?"

"Well, maybe that's the way you would describe him; but I call him a great artist and a grand guy, a gentleman of distinction. Hi, that man was none other than Martin Lawrence!"

"Oh, *him*! Huh! What's he doing out here? I thought Hollywood Boulevard was his stomping ground!"

"Hi!" she scolded, "Don't be so—so querulous! Mr. Lawrence is a wonderful singer—why people all over the world know that!"

"Huh!" Hi grunted just before he took another mouthful of food, "I've heard more pleasant sounds being made by the wind whistling around the chimney corner, than those moaning sounds he makes!"

"Well, just because you don't appreciate his singing is no reason why no one else should. Mr. Lawrence is singing for the boys over there in the hospital tonight."

"Huh!" He snorted again, "The poor fellows must be terribly lonesome to listen to him; but then, I guess anything looks and sounds good to those boys away out here in the country where no one takes the trouble to visit or entertain them!"

"But that is exactly what Mr. Lawrence is doing. He has

taken the trouble, and perhaps time from his regular duties and activities to drive all the way from California just to visit a certain boy on his birthday—and Hi, this particular boy is blind, totally blind and what's more, there is no hope of his sight being restored. Since his one wish was to hear Mr. Lawrence sing and to shake hands with him—oh no! the lad didn't send the request himself, no indeed. He was too modest and too considerate of a popular and busy singer like Martin Lawrence to request so much of his time. He had simply spoken his wish during a conversation with one of his buddies; then the buddy and the attendants at the hospital forwarded the lad's wish to the singer. It will be a total surprise to him, as he has no idea that Mr. Lawrence will be there in person to help him celebrate his birthday and to bring a bit of sunshine into the boy's world of darkness!"

"Well that was pretty decent of Lawrence. I guess he isn't such a bad fellow—even if he does dress like a front man on an Indian Totem pole and his golf is—is. Well, it was darned considerate and obliging of him to come out here for this particular purpose!"

Seeing that Hi was more interested than he pretended to be at first, she told him much of what Martin Lawrence had said to her that morning about the pitiful sight he had described at the hospital, where there were so many blind and nearly blind as well as other casualties of the ruthless war, and how eager they were to hear and "see", by hand-clasp, their favorite singers. By the time they had finished eating, the sour expression and air of indifference or dislike for Martin Lawrence had left Hi's voice and a goodnatured smile appeared on his face. Then Zenobia asked:

"Hi, will you do something—an extra-special favor for me this evening?"

"Zenobia, I've been telling you repeatedly these past weeks that there wasn't a thing that I wouldn't do for you! Sure, just name it honey and I'll do my best!"

"Well, if Sylvia can stand the trip, I would like to have you take me over to the hospital tonight. I'm going to sing for the patients!"

"Ah, now *that* sounds like a reasonable treat for the boys—just to see—I mean *feel* that you are there would make them happy. I'll wager that you'll get a lot more applause than this Lawrence fellow even if he is a famous singer! Ha! You know Sylvia! She's the cleverest, truest and even the

oddest little car that ever wore a license plate; she'll make this trip all right!" Hi replied, thrilled by the fact that Zenobia had at least asked a favor of him.

"Yes, I agree that Sylvia is a bit odd!" Zenobia agreed, "and Hi, would you mind to—er—well, just spread one of my steamer robes from the trailer over the seat? You see, I'm going to wear a white dress tonight and—"

"Sure, sure! I know what you mean; and I'll admit that Sylvia isn't any too tidy—but it isn't her fault. I just forget sometimes and lay greasy wrenches, nuts and bolts on the floor, seat or hood, anywhere it is handiest, when I have to give the poor old girl one of her frequent adjustments! I'll have her spic and span for this occasion. What time do we take off?"

"At seven thirty if we can be ready by then; and thanks Hi—thanks for the boys and me!" she said, patting his hand and favoring him with a smile of gratitude.

"I'll be ready. A boy from the farm over to the east was in this morning and asked if I had some extra work for him. I'll let him take charge of the station while I get Sylvia ready and while we're away this evening. Right now I have a date with a rag mop, a polish cloth and a can of grease remover!" Hi dashed off like a boy getting ready to don his first pair of long pants.

Zenobia arranged the dinner menu and took care of the counter until six o'clock when, with Lupe to help in the kitchen, Tony took over; as he had often done before. She then went to the house trailer and took one of the best of the many heavy steamer robes she had purchased with the trailer, and hung it on the clothes line between the trailer and kitchen door where Hi could find it when he had washed and polished the car Sylvia. She took a bath, using plenty of her best, fragrantly scented soap. She brushed her hair carefully and arranged it in a slight pompadour with a soft roll on top of her head, held in place by jeweled clips, combs and numerous pins. The pink velvet rose nestled over her left ear and temple.

Humming the tune of "THERE'S A BRIGHT STAR" she slipped into the white dress. The long mirror revealed a picture almost as feminine and quaint as the pages of many an old family portrait album. The dark hair piled high on her head, the smooth white neck and shoulders above the soft folds of the off-the-shoulder dress and the billowy skirt,

created a vision of loveliness that was sure to please anyone who was able to see even a spark of light. She added a touch of alluring perfume to each ear, her throat, the palms of her hands and to the folds of her skirt and stood in readiness as Hi sounded a three-tone blast on Sylvia's trumpet horn to announce that he was also ready. She threw a black velvet cape with a silver lining, around her shoulder, locked her trailer home and ran out to the waiting car.

Hi had cleaned the cracked windshield, wiped the dust from the faded hood, scrubbed the steering wheel and Zenobia's robe was carefully tucked over the seat and back, with a portion left to spread over her dress. He had bathed and scrubbed the grime and grease from his hands. Only streaks of the more stubborn kind remained around the edges and under the tips of his closely trimmed nails to remind anyone that he was an automobile mechanic. He was dressed in the brown suit, which had hung on the wall in the little room above the station and his brown shoes were polished to a mirror-like finish. Happy as a school boy on his first date, he tenderly helped the beautiful girl in the fluttering white dress in the little roadster. Gingerly lifting the trailing folds of her gown, he asked:

"Are you going to take these with you?" He tucked them in beside her and draped the corner of the robe across her knees.

"Hope you don't mind the top being down—haven't had a chance to get it repaired. Just this morning I found that the mice had chewed it full of holes, set up housekeeping between the broken bows and that the mouse stork had delivered five little mouslets!" he announced as he climbed in and sat down beside her. At the mention of the mice, she glanced over her shoulder and cast a frightened and suspicious look at the folded top of the roadster only a few inches from the back of her neck. He quickly assured her by laying an arm around her shoulder and saying:

"Don't worry honey! I made sure that not a single, or married mouse remained in the car. I moved the nest to that old box of junk over there behind the station, then I removed the seat cushions and gave them a thorough going over, then drove the car down the road a mile or so then parked it over there on the opposite side of the station so papa and mama mouse wouldn't be tempted to move back into their cozy apartment!"

"Well, that's a relief!" she sighed, with a shudder; and drawing the robe and her cape closer about her as though half expecting a number of the tiny rodents to leap onto her bare shoulder or climb up the folds of her skirt. She clasped her long slender fingers in her lap and smiled sweetly at him as he went through a series of pulling the choke, stepping on the starter, jiggling the gear and making grimaces with his mouth and nose at the same time.

The peculiar looking roadster had originally been a new Dodge—that was before the days of long, lanky, low slung bodies which resemble huge bugs or reptiles crawling the highways. According to the original bill of sale, which Hi still kept, and his oft repeated boast, the car was a late '28 model; but during the years of service, pieces of Chevrolets, bits of Buicks, parts from Pontiacs and scraps from Studebakers had been added until it was as nondescript and indescribable as a mongrel dog. Hi loved his Sylvia with about the same pertinacious fidelity that small boys often bestow upon their favorite dog, or a girl upon her one and only doll.

He had purchased the little car while in his first year of High School in Oklahoma City—in order to make a favorable impression upon a girl named Sylvia. Now Sylvia the girl, had proven fickle and had practically faded from his memory, while Sylvia the car, had seen him through four years of high school, with numerous dates when four husky young people had often piled into the narrow seat on double dates and trips to the games; then for two years at A. and M. at Stillwater, with still more double-date loads.

After receiving his training as a mechanic, Hi was not exactly sure whether he wanted to work on broken down cars or play golf; so Sylvia had waited patiently while he caddied at several well-known golf courses and later, when he was beginning to make a name for himself as a player on the greensward. He was being considered somewhat of an expert at golf and a fanatic over his insistence on driving the rattly roadster, when the fellows of his age were either being drafted or were enlisting in some branch of the armed forces to carry out the program of making the world safe for democracy—the same reason why his father had died in Flanders Field in World War I. Hi had enlisted in the Navy as a machinist and Sylvia had remained faithful, with all four wheels jacked up, in his mother's unlocked garage while he spent three years and seven months

of uneventful life in Uncle Sam's Navy. There he had been sent to an East Coast Navy yard to make repairs on battle-wagons, instead of out on the seven seas where the real history was being made.

When he collected his mustering out pay and had done a bit of celebrating and sight-seeing in the East, he had returned to Oklahoma City where he paid a number of bills for his mother. Then he took Sylvia and drove to the spot on Highway 66, on which he had made a down payment with what remaining cash he had left. Golf had lost most of its interest for him—however, he did hope to make enough in the service station business to purchase a home and have a membership in a golf club, where he could play during leisure hours.

Ever since Zenobia Starr had established the lunchroom across the way, he had worked and wished harder to build up a lucrative business. Regretfully and reluctantly, he told himself that he would be willing to part with Sylvia; if by doing so, he could provide a better car for the girl whom he was sure Fate had meant for him to meet and fall in love with. During the last few days, he had often thought that one of the long, modern cars, which to his notion, looked like overgrown dachshunds, might please her much more than the poc-marked and patched-up roadster. At that very moment he wished for a more modern car as Zenobia waited, and he coaxed:

"Come on old girl! You've never failed me before. Let's be on our way; there's important things to do up yonder on that hill!"

The car groaned, coughed and suddenly the frame shivered, without a sound from the motor—then there was a slight sputter, Hi shifted the gears, the little car turned quietly out onto the highway and headed towards the group of buildings atop the hill in the distance. Hi was proud of the roadster's speed and he silently rebuked himself for even thinking of parting with his darling Sylvia. "Better retire her in mother's empty garage—like a gallant race horse is retired to a pasture of bluegrass, than sell her for a few paltry dollars!" he thought as he turned onto the side road leading to the hospital where Zenobia was to sing.

Like a prima donna being driven to her recital before a gathering of royalty, Zenobia hummed snatches of the tunes she had made up and some of the popular favorites of past

and present. During a moment when she was silent and the car chugged along in a manner which made Hi especially proud of her, he attempted to expound the redeeming attributes of the car. He showed her how he could make it do a good imitation of the rhumba and then the shimmy, just by partially releasing the clutch, putting the brakes on a bit or manipulating the gears in such a way that the car swayed, hesitated and seemed to bounce up and down. The first series of motions would soon have caused the girl to become seasick; and she had to hold the pink velvet rose in place with one hand to prevent it from becoming dislodged from the becoming position in which she had placed it. The latter gyrating motions threatened to jar all four different colored and differently designed fenders loose. Elated and proud of his car, Hi said with exhilaration in his voice:

"Yes Sir! Sylvia is **SOME** car; and she can do most anything that a mule can do except wiggle her ears, bray and eat oats!"

He suddenly put on the brakes, pushed in the clutch, shifted to neutral and turned off the gas all at once in order to make a sudden stop. He almost passed the entrance of the driveway leading to the front steps of the main buildings of the hospital group. He knew that it would never do to let the girl walk through the deep coat of reddish dust with which the parking space was covered.

"I can't let you go in there with your white shoes full of dust—better get out here and I'll take care of Sylvia. Then, if I don't catch up with you somewheres inside, I'll meet you here on the front steps when the concert is over. Go ahead and do your best honey. I know those who can see you will think that a real angel has descended to sing for them—and those who can't see, will know that your voice sounds like what we folks here on earth believe an angel sounds like! Good luck 'Nobia!"

"Thanks Hi! I'll see you later!"

Gathering her cape around her and lifting her skirts to protect them from the dust and prevent them from touching the steps, Zenobia started up the cement steps leading to the entrance of the administration building. Her heart began to pound; she felt very much alone. She wished that Hi had parked the car first then come in with her. For the first time since she had decided to come here and sing, she began to wonder just how she should announce herself—then with

some misgivings as to the outcome, she suddenly realized that she was literally crashing the gates—that no one had invited her! She had no letter of introduction—not even a sheet of music. She swallowed the lump in her throat and scolded herself:

“Zenobia Starr! What are you afraid of? You want to sing don’t you? You want to make good—you want to see the boy’s faces light up with real pleasure like Mr. Lawrence said they did when Miss Langford said? Well, I’m not Miss Langford, but I’m not exactly homely and I *do* want to sing—to make the lads happy, *SO* I’ll sing if it kills me!”

Holding her head high, she entered the big entrance hall. There were attendants, nurses and men in chairs and on crutches, passing in various directions of the criss-crossing halls and corridors. Several, who turned to look her way and could see, gasped at sight of the lovely girl in the misty dress which almost touched the floor. The toes of the silver sandals twinkled as they peeped from under the edge of the satin and chiffon hems. Smiling as if he expected to see her, an attendant in uniform rushed up to her and said:

“How do you do young lady! You are the singer with the orchestra aren’t you? I didn’t know they were bringing a lady singer—but won’t the boys be delighted! To hear Mr. Lawrence will be a treat, but to hear and to see you will be a double treat!”

“Thank you Sir!” she stammered, “But—you see—”

“Oh yes! yes of course you would like to lay off your wraps! Pardon me, but I’m very excited myself. It isn’t very often that we receive such beautiful surprises up here on this hill! Right this way Miss; and when you are ready, I’ll have someone to show you through the wards!”

Feeling relieved that the attendant’s mistake had carried her this far, and growing more self-confident, Zenobia entered the powder room where the few feminine visitors freshened up before visiting their men in the wards, or where they went to wash away traces of tears after visiting them. She placed her cape on a hook, powdered her nose, smoothed her hair and shook out the folds from her dress. Then, smiling and eager, she stepped out into the hall, and a tall, slender youth in a khaki colored uniform stepped forward, bowed gallantly from the waist and offered his arm.

“Mr. Lawrence has just visited the lower wards and is now in the auditorium, shall we go there?” he asked.

"No, not at present. I'd like to visit the wards on this floor also," she replied.

"It isn't a very pleasant sight," her escort warned, in a voice that conveyed more than the words implied. "But the boys will be glad to see—I mean to have you visit them. You see Miss, most of them are blind or practically so. Here we are, walk right in."

They entered a large room. For a moment the girl paused; she had never imagined that a sight like this existed. From the rows of beds, heads were turned to face her; but she knew that few eyes could see her. Her escort touched her arm and she paused beside a bed on which lay a youth with tousled dark hair and a pair of dark eyes that strained to see her.

"Davy, this is Miss—er—" he paused as he realized that he did not know the girl's name.

"Oh how thoughtless of me not to introduce myself! I'm Miss Zenobia Starr—and I'm very glad to know you, Davy!" She clasped his slender, bony hand in both of hers and smiled down at the youthful face, which appeared far too young to belong to a veteran of the last war.

"Gee, Miss Satrr! I can't see—except just a little bit out of my left eye; but I know you're beautiful—why you look just like I always imagined an angel would look!" Davy said, in an eager, boyish voice.

"You're quite right Davy, she is beautiful—and she's going to sing for you!"

"Oh swell! What are you going to sing? Something heavenly, I'll bet!"

"I'm going to sing something special for you and your buddies here—a song that has never been sung before!"

"I wonder if I know the melody. Do you suppose I could play my violin? You see, I was studying the violin before I enlisted in the army. I wanted to be a concert violinist!" Davy said with such enthusiasm that she promptly replied:

"Oh I'd love to have you accompany me. That is a splendid idea, for I'll need all the help I can get. Tune it up while I say hello to the other boys, then we'll give them some music that they'll never forget!" she said laughingly and moved on from bed to bed.

The expressions on the faces that she looked down upon, filled her with a tender sympathy that she had never felt

before; then a desire to sing to them as a mother feels toward a sick or maimed child. She glanced toward Davy's bed. He was propped up, the violin held firmly against his shoulder as he tried each note. His hand caressed the bow. Zenobia paused in the center of the room and began to hum the tune of her song: "THERE'S A BRIGHT STAR SHINING FOR YOU". Davy listened intently—picked a few notes, tightened a string then drew the bow over the instrument.

Gradually the tones of the violin blended with the girl's voice. Eyes shiny with mist, she began to sing:

"THERE'S A BRIGHT STAR SHINING JUST FOR
YOU: PRAY FORGIVE US IF WE SEEM TO
FORGET: WE LOVE YOU, HONEST WE DO!"
"THERE'S LOVE IN OUR HEARTS WE CAN'T
EXPRESS,
"IT'S VALOR, IT'S STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE
YOU CAN ONLY GUESS!"

She sang a few words, then crooned or hummed the melody—words of praise, hope and glory for the men and promises of undying gratitude to them, poured as spontaneous and extemporaneously from her lips as sweet clear water gushes from a hillside spring.

When the last note had died away, there was an ear-splitting roar of applause, of whistling, handclapping and shouts; and from many a sightless eye, sprang tears of sheer happiness and renewed courage. Then there was a thunderous appeal for an encore. Zenobia took her cue and inspiration from that moment and began a second verse. Words seemed to spring from some unseen voice which whispered then into her mind and Davy played a beautiful accompaniment on his violin. When she had finished, she bowed and smiled in the direction of each row of beds, then turned to see Martin Lawrence and another man whom she supposed to be the leader of the orchestra, standing at the doorway. Lawrence rushed forward and grasping her hands in his, smiled and exclaimed:

"That was great! Wonderful! Please accept my congratulations! Hey fellows, isn't she a glorious singer?"

Applause, cheers and pleasant comments were the answers; and from the din could be heard someone calling for a duet

by Lawrence and the girl. Then others joined in until the request became a clamor.

"You're both swell singers; now let's have a duet!" they shouted.

"How about it Miss Starr — shall we try?" Lawrence asked.

"Try?" she exclaimed, "That's what we're here for—Of course we'll sing—sing as we have never sung before!"

"Good! you start and I'll join in somewhere!"

Zenobia began humming a soothing tune that she had used with the words of her own songs: "I'LL BE THINKING OF YOU!" The patients became quiet, she nodded to Davy, who had begun to pick up the tune on his violin. Lawrence signalled to Hayden, the orchestra leader, and when he stepped to his side, he said:

"Quick Hayden, tell the boys to grab their instruments, there's a piano just inside the next room. I have no idea what Miss Starr is going to sing, but we're going to join in and make up in volume what we might lack in harmony!"

Hayden and his men scampered to their places. Three of them had to race up to the next floor for their instruments while the connecting door leading to a little chapel was thrown open and a small, upright piano moved to the center of the room.

Davy was in perfect tune with Zenobia's voice as she hummed. Lawrence joined her through several bars of the hauntingly sweet melody; and as they noticed the hastily assembled orchestra, she began to sing:

"I'LL BE THINKING OF YOU—THERE'S NOTHING
I'D RATHER DO; I CAN NEVER REPAY YOU
FOR THE HAPPINESS OF THIS DAY!"

Lawrence seemed to anticipate her next words and he reflected her mood. She smiled at him and sang a few words, then he carried on with a corresponding line. Both singers were thrilled and inspired as only great artists can be; and they turned and faced different directions as though they were singing to each boy individually. Hayden's orchestra had picked up the tune of the beautiful, but unwritten, melody and his music formed a harmonious background. Davy's violin rendered an obligatto which complimented the singer's voices. Sometimes they sang together, then she would hum while he sang; when he was not quite sure of

the next line, he would hum while she filled in appropriate words.

The song ended and the sincere and hearty applause was the boys way of saying "Thank you!" They were content, for they wanted that sweet, simple melody to remain with them. Some of the more serious cases were growing tired, so Zenobia bid a cheerful goodnight as they passed quietly past each bed. At Davy's she paused as he lay back on his pillow with the small violin clasped to his breast and he whispered, in almost childish excitement:

"I'll play those melodies every day! I know a lot of the boys will want to hear them too. I wonder, could you give me a copy of the words?"

"Yes Davy, I'll send a copy to you just as soon as one is written; and that will be very soon; for, believe me, those words came directly from my heart—I WILL BE THINKING OF YOU!" she replied. She and Lawrence promised to pay them another visit and to send recordings of several songs to them.

"Well, since you have made such a hit with those boys, you must visit some of the other wards upstairs and the auditorium," Lawrence said. Then he introduced the excited and happy girl to Hayden and his men who then followed them up the stairs, except the pianist, each carrying his instrument. They termed this their most unique experience since becoming musicians.

At the door of the next ward, they heard a series of spontaneous laughter and, upon entering, they found Hi Hills entertaining the victims of the battlefields with some of the many stories and jokes he had picked up on the golf courses, in the Navy and at the service station.

"Picking up jokes is one of my hobbies" he had often said, "and no matter how old they are, they still produce a chuckle. If some of them are a bit worn or soiled, they can be mended and polished up a bit until they're funny but not filthy!"

Having encountered a K.P. who was emptying the garbage near where he had parked Sylvia, Hi had sprung a joke on him, then the dishwasher had asked him to come inside where he could tell a few lively jokes to the cooks and attendants in kitchen and mess hall. From there, Hi had gradually worked his way up to the attendant's dormitory and on out to the wards.

When the men in the wards saw Lawrence returning, accompanied by the attractive girl in the billowy white dress, they gasped, groaned and whew-whewed, then one bold fellow called:

"Hey Lawrence! Have you been holding out on us?"

"Fellows!" Lawrence said, placing an arm around the girl's waist and leading her forward, "This is Miss Starr; who not only has a name like a heavenly body and looks like an angel, but she also sings like one—that is, like I imagine angels sing. Since I have never heard one, I can only guess or imagine—want to hear her?"

The answer was unmistakable. They sang two numbers; Hi standing by and filling in odd moments with jokes and wry remarks. They visited as many as possible by ten o'clock; when Zenobia became a bit hoarse. She was supremely happy—happy because she had been the means of bringing a fleeting moment of pleasure to so many men to whom the country, those living and those yet unborn, owed so much. She knew, without a doubt, that this was her first big step forward towards the goal she had longed for; but no matter to what heights her career might carry her, she knew that this night's experience would be the firm foundation upon which she could begin building. Regardless of what manner of glory she might attain on the road to fame this would always remain the one bright shining star of achievement.

"It has been a great pleasure to meet you Miss Starr; and let me assure you that the confidence and courage required to come here tonight convinces me that you do indeed have a great and interesting future before you. I feel that we shall meet again—perhaps much sooner than we realize!"

"Thank you Mr. Lawrence! It has been so wonderful—an experience I'll never forget! I feel as if I had stepped out of a story book like Cinderella, and must return to the lunch room! I don't know what else to say—only that I must not pause at the lunchroom too long—I'm not sure how or where, but I *must* go on and—yes, I *will* be seeing you again someday. Good night Mr. Lawrence!"

"Goodnight and the best of luck!" he said as he clasped her hand in one of his and patted it encouragingly with the other. Then she passed through the wide front doors, between two smiling attendants and ran down the steps where Hi was waiting to escort her to the little roadster, which stood by with motor running.

The night air seemed chilly after leaving the rooms where

a warm, even temperature was maintained. Hi paused before helping her in and tied the ribbon ties at the collar of the black velvet cape she wore, into what he thought, was an attractive bow. Noticing the hoarseness of her voice, he pulled the soft shirred collar of the garment up close about her throat, then helped her in and tucked the portion of the robe that covered his share of the seat, over her lap. He was tired but happy, as he sat down beside her. Glancing up at the dimming lights in the many windows of the big buildings, he said:

" 'Nobia, that was a wonderful idea, hunch, inspiration or whatever it was that brought you here tonight! I've a feeling that your visit was the nicest thing that has happened to most of the boys in a long, long time—and I'm mighty proud of you!"

"Thanks Hi—to you and Sylvia for bringing me here; I couldn't have managed without you!"

The little car nosed its way down the winding road which led to the hospital. Both occupants became silent and sober of expression. Hi finally broke the silence by saying:

"I wonder why this crazy world don't stop this idiotic fighting, killing and demolishing cities, and filling hospitals with boys like those back there!"

"Yes," she sighed thoughtfully, "just think how much good they could be doing if the same amount of energy and expense was used for construction instead of destruction. How heart-breaking it must be to have to just lie there in bed and see all their plans and hopes fade into impossibilities!" She choked back a sob; but a tear ran down each of her cheeks. Hi glanced at her and saw the tears glistening in the moonlight. He coughed, blew his nose with a vicious snort, then grabbing the steering wheel savagely with both hands, he snapped:

"Aw heck! Why should you or me or anyone else feel ashamed to be seen, or heard crying over the plight of those poor fellows! Come on 'Nobia let's have a good cry while we're at it—we'll feel a lot better if we let the whole selfish, greedy, brasshearted world know that we care about those kids!" He suddenly turned the car to the side of the road, shut off the motor and turned off the lights, then sat bolt upright, bawling like a hungry calf waiting for its belated mother's return from the pasture. Zenobia began to snivel audibly; then lying her head on Hi's shoulder, she began to wail and her body shook with the escape of the

emotions that had gotten beyond control.

The pink velvet rose fell unnoticed to the floor of the car. Her tears moistened the padded shoulders of his brown suit. Hi paused occasionally in his audible weeping to utter vituperate invectives at the Nazi, Facist, aggressors and outlaw agrarians—and she gulped and added: “And those pagan Reds!” Together, they lambasted, denounced or damned every scoundrel from war-mongers, crooked politicians and war-crazed would be conquerors of the world. They dared them to appear and let them tell them personally what they thought should be done with them—not only here, but in the here-after!

It required thirty minutes for the couple in the parked roadster, on the country highway, to relieve their feelings by expressing in words what had been in their minds for months. The generous and unchecked tears finally washed away some of the resentment and disgust they had felt and the world before them took on a clearer and more concise aspect. They realized that, much as they desired to do so, they could not remodel the world, or change the global happenings without help from others—millions of other folks who felt as they did.

“Feeling better now honey?” Hi asked, as he reached around with his left hand and patted her cheek.

“Yes Hi—lots better. Now let’s go home!”

“A good idea! Gracious yes, if we stayed out much later, you might over-sleep in the morning and then you couldn’t awaken me and I’d over-sleep; and that wouldn’t do! No sir, it just *wouldn’t* do for me to lose a single customer, not by a long shot! I need every penny that little grease and gas joint brings in!”

“Why? Isn’t business as good as usual, or as you expected?” she asked, as he thoughtfully took his “dress-up” handkerchief, as he called the extra fancy and spotlessly clean square of linen that peeked from the pocket over his left breast, and carefully wiped her moist eyes in order to spare the dainty bit of lace that she had been daubing at them with.

“Ye-s, it’s doing all right. I guess the main trouble is, that I expect too much. It was all right when I had only my own future to plan for; but now, I want to plan for someone else. I want a home and maybe an income sufficient to allow me to play some golf once in a while. Why it’s been so long since I played a game of golf, I probably wouldn’t know which end of the club to use!”

"Are you sure that you aren't also pining for a chance to bet on the horses? I understand that has been one of your weaknesses in the past!"

"Oh, I wouldn't bet on just any nag that trotted up to the starting line—but, well, I'd rather play a game of golf for excitement—unless I saw a sure shot on the track!"

"Very well Hi, we've done our duty at the hospital, cursed and discussed the world's problems and we realize that we must be up at six o'clock in the morning, so tell Sylvia that we are ready to proceed!"

The car started at a single plunge of the starter. Hi smiled jubilantly at her, then as he pointed the patched and battered hood back into the main road, he started to laugh—in deep chuckles at first, then out loud as he slapped his hand down on the steering wheel. Zenobia looked at him as though she suspected he had suddenly lost his reason, or had become hysterical over the events of the past few hours; finally she demanded:

"For goodness sake Hi, what has come over you all of a sudden? Only a few minutes ago, you were wailing like a lost banshee with a toothache and now you're laughing like a hyena that has just captured a nice fat pig!"

"Oh Honey! I was just thinking!" he giggled, "I'll bet this is the first time in the history of mankind that a pretty girl, all dressed up like a princess or something, and a fellow that's just beginning to feel what it's like to be in love, park beside a quiet road on a moonlit night just to have a good cry!"

Zenobia let out a squeal of laughter at the ludicrous situation and they laughed until the car stopped near the rear of the house trailer. Tony was still on duty at the cafe, so she said:

"Want to come in and have a sandwich, a piece of pie and a cup of coffee?"

"No thanks 'Nobia, I don't exactly feel like eating—and I did drink two cups of coffee at the hospital. When I was a little shaver, my grandmother used to tell me that when I was real sorry for something I had done or said and was miserable because I said or did it, that food would only make me feel worse. She said that I should say a real good, earnest prayer and go to bed! And do you know? I tried it *and* it worked!"

"Now Hi, what have you done to demand such strict repentance?—Hi!" she asked sternly, "You haven't been—

say, *did* you tell those boys some of your dirty stories and jokes?"

"N-o-o! not too dirty—they were just slightly messy—besides this isn't for any wrongs I committed—it's for others' wrongs—things that played havoc with those boys plans! Grandmother's rule works both ways!"

"In that case, I'll devote a few extra minutes to prayer—perhaps that will be the answer to many of our problems and I think it was very sweet and wise and good of you to think of that." She replied, as Hi unlocked the trailer house door and she turned to tell him goodnight. The moon was brighter now and the satin shimmered through the mist of chiflon. Hi stood for an instant looking down at her, then placed his hands on her shoulders and, in a husky voice said:

"You're sweet! Say what a pair we'd make! Why you're the sweetest little person that I know of—and you look like a bride in that white dress. Aw please 'Nobia darling, let's get married! I just can't stand to see you trying to run that lunchroom and fighting all your own battles; besides, I'm in love, madly in love with you!" He would have drawn her to him in a tight embrace but she withdrew a few inches and said:

"You've heard of Belle Starr, haven't you?" and when he nodded his head in the affirmative, she continued: "Well I'm supposed to be a distant relative of hers; and if history is even partially correct, she had no trouble fighting her own, as well as other people's battles, if she decided to defend them. I can't or would not wield a six-gun like she was supposed to have done, but I can take care of myself—at least, I still believe that I can! No, Hi, I'm positive that you want me to be happy; but I wouldn't be if I married you just now. You see, I'm going to California. No, no silly, I'm not going to forget you!"

"You can't mean that!" he said, impatient and slightly angered at her stubbornness and indifference to his declarations of love. "And *how* will you get there? California is fifteen hundred miles away. Do you expect to—to hitch-hike your house trailer all the way out there!"

"I haven't figured that out yet; but I'll get there somehow—just give me time!"

Hi looked into her serious eyes. He couldn't understand just what had prompted her sudden determination to go to California. He thought she was reconciled to the plans she had made a few days ago, to remain and try to clear the

cafe of its debt before making such a drastic move. Then that little imp, jealousy, whispered the name of Martin Lawrence into his ear; and he recalled Lawrence's last words to her. In an accusing tone he asked:

"*Well!* have you, by any chance, fallen in love with this fellow Martin Lawrence?" Even in the moonlight, he could see an angry flash pass over her face. She looked at him for a second, then replied calmly:

"I think Mr. Lawrence is a very nice person; but I know very little about him, other than that he is a wonderful singer. I can't say that I am in love with him—although I wouldn't blame myself if I were!" Stepping up into the doorway of the big coach, she said: "thanks again Hi, for taking me to the hospital—now we both need some sleep. Good-night!" Suddenly she leaned forward and planted a kiss upon his cheek; an act which completely disarmed him and pushed the shadow of the green-eyed monster far back into his mental storehouse where it might wriggle out again when the right opportunity presented itself. Looking up into her face, so close to his, he said softly:

" 'Nobia, that was a sweet kiss; but I can think of a place where I'd much rather have it than on that bewhiskered jaw!"

"Perhaps some day; but not now Hi—goodnight!"

With the kiss fresh upon his cheek, the sweet, tantalizing odor of her perfume in his nose and conflicting worries concerning her in his mind, he walked across the highway on which the traffic was at its usual tide—night drivers going each direction on their various errands.

Zenobia removed the white dress and placed it tenderly in the chest beneath the divan. As she removed her makeup and the salty tearstains from her face, she tried desperately to think of some way in which to raise enough money to take her west without selling the house trailer. She laughingly accused herself of feeling almost the same about her trailer as Hi did about Sylvia! "If I only had a car!" she thought. She frankly admitted to herself that nothing less than a miracle could prevent her from losing the lunchroom; for she had discovered that the note required that she must pay half the sum her father had borrowed within three weeks, and the balance in ninety days.

A quick mental calculation convinced her that she could raise the first payment by using the balance of her father's insurance money and all she had put aside to pay for sup-

plies and help. This would leave her broke and with nothing to run the business on and the chances of the place clearing enough to meet the final payment were doubtful. To make matters still worse, Tony had told her that very morning that the farmer, whose tenant house he and Lupe occupied, would soon require the full time services of he and his wife. So she would be without help, even if she could manage to clear enough with which to pay them. She decided that she might open later and close earlier, so she could manage to do the cooking and waiting on customers herself; but this would mean the loss of many good customers.

"Oh well, there must be some way out of this dilemma; but I'm too tired, sleepy and busy with other thoughts to decide what is best to do, or what I can do right now!" she sighed, as she turned back the covers, fluffed the pillow and crawled into bed. Looking out the window over her bed, she saw only the dark, open windows of Hi's sleeping quarters—evidently he was already in bed and sound asleep. A wave of something akin to remorse came over her as she switched off the little light over her pillow, lay down and thought of leaving Hi. She realized that it would not be easy to face life in a strange city—even if she did manage to get to California—knowing that he was more than a thousand miles away. She was sleepy, yet she could not go to sleep but kept thinking of the events of the evening—the hospital—of them sitting beside the road crying like two spanked babies! Then the remark he had made about her hitch-hiking her trailer to California. "I wonder" she mused, "I *just* might do that very thing—we'll see how favorable and possible the idea appears in the morning!"

Chapter Four

A STRANGE HITCH-HIKE

WHEN ZENOBIA awoke at five o'clock in the morning, following her successful visit to the veteran's hospital, it was as though the subject of the night before had remained on her pillow and was demanding immediate attention, now that she was awake. She removed the small chamois bag in which she kept her money, from under her pillow, poured the contents out on the bed and counted each bill and coin—although she knew almost to a dime how much the bag con-

tained Again she figured by what margin she could make the first installment on the note—then she considered the chances of making the final payment, of her being able to run the little lunchroom all alone in case Tony and Lupe did leave her. She faced the situation squarely and unbiased and decided that to try to redeem the little cafe would be like throwing good money after bad and she sprang out of bed with a determination firmly planted in her mind—she would attempt to get her trailer pulled, towed, or moved to California! While a smile of inspiration lighting her face, she exclaimed:

“Perhaps Hi was right when he used the word ‘hitch-hike!’”

Hi was very busy that day trying to repair the top on the car Sylvia. He wanted to be prepared for any kind of weather in case Zenobia asked him to take her to town, to the hospital again or any place else. He removed the worn and mouse-eaten fabric top, replaced the broken bow with one he had found at a salvage lot, then attached the new covering which he had ordered a few weeks ago and had had some difficulty in getting, due to the age and model of the little car. When the car was in the best possible shape that he could put it, he surveyed it with satisfaction; and wondered what his reply would be if Zenobia should ask him to drive her to California. Had Martin Lawrence not so suddenly and vividly appeared on the horizon, he might not have been so opposed to her going there. A few hours ago, he would have gladly given the car to her for the journey she seemed so anxious and determined to make, if there had been the remotest possibility that the ancient roadster could pull the thirty foot, four wheeled trailer such a distance, even with him driving—he knew all of Sylvia's tricks, defects and mechanical eccentricities. He was convinced that such a thing would be out of the question. He was positive that no one could drive the little car with the same maximum of success he obtained; and then too, if the small roadster was attached to the trailer, it would look something like a gnat pulling a load of logs.

His mind was in a turmoil—he was not sure that the girl he loved should go galavanting off to California alone; yet he saw no way to prevent her; even if he really wanted to. He knew that it would be useless and even dangerous, for him to pursue his attempts to get her to change her mind—for too much antagonism might cause a rift in their friendship, love or mutual admiration or whatever it was that

attracted them to each other. He was uncertain as to just how much, or where, Martin Lawrence figured in her renewed determination to go west; and try as he may, to prevent it, little suspicions and fragments of jealousy and of doubt crept into his mind to put him in such a mental state that he was forgetful while performing his regular daily tasks, and more or less curt and discourteous to his customers.

Zenobia had Lupe help out for a couple of hours while she rinsed out a few pieces of clothing and cleaned and rearranged the house trailer. Now that she found herself actually preparing for the journey instead of merely hoping to go, she considered every possibility. Knowing full well that the housing situation in the Golden State was a major problem to thousands, she felt that the luxurious and completely equipped coach would solve that problem for her—once she succeeded in getting there.

Due to the method she had decided to employ to get the trailer moved to California, she realized that it might require weeks, instead of two or three days as was required to drive the distance in modern cars, to complete the journey in the hazardous hit-and-miss plan she had in mind. Should she become sidetracked along the way, she would require food for herself; and realizing, with a wry smile, that she might get stranded in some isolated spot where there was no place to purchase food, she began to prepare for just such an emergency. She carried in cans of fruits, vegetables and meats from the cafe's well-stocked shelves. The groceries were paid for as she purchased them, and were not included in the mortgage. She filled cupboards, drawers and the floor-spaces of the two closets with cans and boxes of edibles—even including boxes of pancake flour and ready-mix biscuit flour.

"If I'm lucky and go straight through, I can use this food after I get there—for it might be some time before I get a job!" she said to herself. When everything, except the refrigerator, was filled almost to capacity—she planned to fill the refrigerator at the last minute, with fresh meat, milk, butter and other things that required icing. The water tank which supplied water for the sink and shower was filled; and she checked to make sure that the four tires on the small wheels of the trailer were properly inflated. She was glad that she had purchased new tires, including a spare, when she bought the secondhand trailer from its former owner.

During the day and until closing time, that evening, Zenobia kept a close watch-out for any car heading west that

might possibly be used to pull her trailer. One man, the driver of a comparatively new sedan, who was headed for Phoenix, discussed the situation as he ate a sandwich, but when he walked around to take a look at his prospective passenger, he shook his head and said:

"No Miss, I wouldn't attempt to drag that huge affair all the way to Phoenix for any price!"

Both she and Hi were too busy to discuss her plans that day, and she retired later than usual, tired and somewhat worried, but still determined.

About ten thirty the next morning, a tow car driven by a mechanic and his helper and headed west, stopped for refreshments. The sign on the side of the truck with the tow-dolly on the rear, advertised the name of a garage in Clinton, Oklahoma; and Zenobia recalled having seen it pass a number of times before; the drivers had usually stopped to eat. The driver, a middle-aged man with a shock of sandy colored hair, clear blue eyes and a friendly manner, was easy to approach with even such an unusual problem as she posed. His blue eyes looked calmly at her as she asked:

"How far west are you going Mister?"

"How far? Well, we're going to a gas station just outside Amarillo," he replied.

"How much would you charge to tow my house trailer, the one parked outside, as far as you go?"

Hum-m! Well Miss, t' be frank with ye' I never undertook a job like that—besides, we're paid for this trip by th' owner of a string of trucks in Clinton. One o' th' trucks broke down and th' driver quit, so we're goin' t' pull th' truck in for them."

"I'd be glad to pay you extra—and it would be a great help to me I assure you, if you would consider pulling the trailer that far"

"Who or where do you want the trailer delivered to?" he asked. Recognizing a faint promise in his question, she quickly replied:

"Oh, I'll be going along."

"Is your car in Amarillo?"

"No, I have no car. My father lost practically everything we owned, even the car he owned and we mortgaged this lunchroom before he died suddenly, two weeks ago. The trailer was my own and I want, very much, to get to California with it. So you can see how desperate I am—how much it will help for you to take me as far as you go!"

"Pretty risky business Miss, this startin' out like that! I

s'pose you have friends or relatives in Amarillo an' in California?"

"I have found that one has friends everywhere—anywhere we will accept friendship," she replied, evading a direct answer to the man's solicitous query.

"Hum-m! Well seein' as I've already been paid an' since I always try to accomodate folks when ever I can, I guess we'd just as leave take th' trailer as t' go without it, an' since you seem t' know what you're doin'—oh by th' way, there's just one more question, how old are you young lady?"

"Oh!" she laughed, "I'm almost twenty-one—a girl is of age at eighteen in Oklahoma. I have my birth certificate and my driver's license, if you would like to see them!"

"No, no! I'll take your word—just wanted t' make sure that you was your own boss. Didn't want t' take any chances o' gettin' charged with transportin' minors across th' state line."

"Then you'll take my trailer?"

"Yes, for better er for worse, I'll give you yer first pull on this jousney; an' I sincerely hope that everything turns out fer th' best. So, get ready an' we'll be on our way!"

"The trailer is practically ready now; you can hitch on and I will be ready in less than thirty minutes!"

Elated with her success so far; and not wishing to keep the tow car waiting; she put Tony in charge of the lunch-room, told him to notify the new owner she had left, and asked Lupe to carry a few bottles of milk, cream and some butter, steaks, chops, bacon, sausages, and fresh vegetables and fill the ice box in the house traler, while she ran over to say goodbye to Hi.

She found him working on a car that was to be picked up that afternoon. He swallowed hard and stared aghast when she repeated:

"I've come to tell you goodbye. Hi, I'm on my way to California!"

"To California!" he gasped, dropping the big wrench he held in his hand and brushing a greasy sleeve over his forehead to wipe away the perspiration and the fog of startled, mixed emotions, which made the world look very dreary to him just then. His eyes wandered to where the tow car was backing the trailer out beside the highway. He was convinced that she was in earnest. The only protest he could think of was:

"Aw 'Nobia! You shouldn't leave like this! Who are the men who are taking you to California?"

"I really don't know the name of the man who drives the tow car; but he's only going as far as Amarillo; but that is a good start. You see Hi, I *am* going to hitch-hike my trailer to California, or my name isn't Zenobia Starr!"

He groaned, shook his head in despair and looked helplessly about, as she continued: "Bye-bye Hi! I'll write to you—honest I will! Might even drop you a card now and then while I'm on my way; but I'll write as soon as I arrive and get my trailer parked in a convenient place!" She tiptoed and planted a kiss upon one grease-smeared cheek and patted the other with her hand; then turned and dashed across the highway and calling to the men in the tow car: "O.K. fellows, I'll be ready just as soon as I say goodbye to Tony and Lupe!"

She encountered the Mexican man and his wife at the kitchen door, each with their arms full of groceries. Tony carried two cured hams and three slabs of bacon on one arm and a huge pail of shortening in the other, while Lupe carried several pounds of butter and a dozen loaves of fresh bread that had just been delivered.

"Goodbye Tony and Lupe! I don't know how I would have managed without your splendid help! Thanks also for this last minute boost in carrying the groceries to the trailer for me. You take the remaining groceries home with you; they are paid for and I want you to have them—and deliver the keys and papers relinquishing my interest in the cafe, which I signed and placed in the cash register drawer, to Mr. Dobbins." She shook each dark-skinned hand as Lupe said:

"Buena suerte Señorita!" And Tony said:

"Ud. es muy amable—Adios Senorita!"

She signaled to the driver, stepped inside the coach and closed and locked the door, as the car moved onto Highway 66. She gasped in amazement at the huge quantities of groceries, meats, eggs and ready cooked food that Tony and Lupe had carried in and deposited on the cabinet, in the sink, on the breakfast table and even on the front divan and the floor. A bag of potatoes leaned against the cabinet and a crate of cabbage, lettuce, carrots and other fresh fruits sat in the middle of the floor! She hurriedly picked her way to the rear of the coach and raised the venetian blind at the rear window, waved, blew a kiss and smiled at Hi, who stood exactly as she had left him a few moments ago—like a

somber faced, inert statue that had been placed there and had no power to move.

Zenobia lingered at the window until the trailer lurched around a curve in the road and he was lost to view. Suddenly she felt miserable and almost panic-stricken at leaving him. A tear welled up in each of her expressive grey eyes; despite her efforts to blink them back.

When a pound carton of butter slid off the smooth surface of the breakfast table and fell with a loud smack to the floor, her mind was instantly changed and was now filled with the task of stowing away the vast amount of food that Tony and Lupe had added to that which she had already carried in.

She discovered the refrigerator was jammed full of bottles of fresh milk and stacks of steaks, chops, cutlets and one huge rolled boneless roast. A whole case, twelve dozen eggs, fresh from a farm, was sitting in the corner near the little desk; and she counted eight freshly baked, and still warm, pies, some with berry or fruit juice oozing through the holes in the crust, while others were topped with fluffy, golden meringue.

"I wonder if they expected me to eat all of this food before it spoils!" She laughed to herself; then pondered a moment and said reflectively: "It might not be such a bad idea after all—even though it is a bit over-done; for anyone who pulls this trailer will have to eat—so, I can show my hospitality by offering them a few good meals along the way!"

She finally succeeded in making a place for the pies where would not spill, slide off or become mashed, by placing them in a large roaster and in big kettles and pans in the storage compartment, below the four burner butane hot plate. Since the weather was cool, the butter would keep for a few days without refrigeration; so what she could not squeeze in beside the milk and meat, she placed around and between the pots and pans near the stove. The many loaves of bread, two dozen doughnuts and six rings of coffee cakes were wrapped in a clean tablecloth and placed in a cardboard carton.

When everything was in place, so far as there was any place for it, she sat down on the front divan beside a twenty-five pound bag of sugar, to rest. Her spirits were spiraling higher and higher each moment. She leaned back and said:

"Well, here I am, with food enough to keep me from total starvation for a year, a place to sleep, almost three hundred dollars in cash—and headed west. I'm dreadfully anxious to

see what California has to offer a more or less giddy, eccentric and ambitious girl who's only regret right now is having to leave a positively decent, adorable, but rather sleepy-headed fellow like Hiram Hills behind for some designing dame to come along and snatch up!—Hey Mister! Who invited *you* to come along?" she said aloud; as she noticed a huge cockroach scurry across the floor; evidently in search of a crack or crevice large enough for him to hide in.

Seizing a small hammer from the cutlery drawer of the cabinet, she wacked the shiny black beetle hard enough to stun him, then scooped him up on a dust pan and flushed him down the drain in the tiny bathroom.

Wishing to completely erase all evidence of the lunch-room, she removed the little white apron and the green and white checked uniform and stuffed them into the laundry bag, then donned a grey skirt and bright red sweater, lifted the bag of sugar off and placed it on top of the case of eggs, then stretched out on the divan at the front end of the coach, where the swaying motion was not so noticeable, and began to plan for her future. She had the advantage over most people, in that she knew what she wanted to do; and she was confident that she would eventually succeed if given an opportunity and nothing unforeseen happened to deter her.

Judging from all the purportedly authentic articles she had read about the success of many singers, she knew that a considerable amount of "acting" would be required of her; but she wasn't exactly sure about what course she should pursue or what studies, or other preparations would be required. She fully realized that the doors leading to highly prized goals in Hollywood were often very difficult to open. She had read many stories of bitter disappointments and tragic failures for those who had knocked repeatedly and were refused entrance. She tried to put the thoughts of such happenings out of her mind. She must concentrate on the success of Zenobia Starr only, if she was to reach her goal.

The motion of the trailer, as it rolled along at a steady pace over the smooth-surfaced highway, was pleasing to her. Regardless of the fact that she did not know how or when she would find someone to pull her on to the end of her journey after the tow car had left her in Amarillo, she was anxious to get that far; for youth, beauty and health as well as self-confidence and ambitions were all in her favor.

Chapter Five

HI JOINS THE EXODUS

HI MOVED ABOUT as one in a trance for several hours after Zenobia left. The suddenness of her departure stunned him; but the manner in which she left exasperated and galled him until he began to hate himself.

"If I hadn't opened my big mouth, she would never have thought of such an idiotic idea as hitch-hiking fifteen hundred miles with a thirty-foot house trailer—or, now *would* she?" he mumbled. He half expected and strongly hoped that she would become discouraged, change her mind and return. He gritted his teeth when he saw Mr. Dobbins, the new owner of the little cafe, a frisky little man of fifty—who seemed to be trying to make up in cockiness for what he lacked in size, take possession of the familiar little building across the highway. Mr. Dobbins' robust wife and his frail looking daughter and her husband had come with him when he arrived after receiving Tony's message, to help run the eating place which he had come into possession by means of a default in paying off the mortgage. The little man bustled about, giving orders and asking questions, then usually answering them himself before anyone had time to grasp what he was talking about.

Hi could hear Dobbins' loud voice, which was unbelievably deep for one so small, boasting of changes that would soon be made and complaints about "assanine" mistakes that had been made when the lunchroom had been opened.

"His name might be Dobbins; but "jackass" would suit him much better—then we could expect him to be braying all over the place!" Hi thought, as he heard of plans being made to remove the "Starr" sign and replace it with the word "Dobbins".

At four o'clock in the afternoon, when hunger finally drove Hi to swallow his pride and try to conceal his dislike for the entire Dobbins "herd" as he called the family, he went over to the lunchroom for a combination late lunch and early dinner. He ordered a steak, but it wasn't cooked at all like Zenobia cooked steaks. Mrs. Dobbins, the new cook, had doused some queer-tasting sauce over it; and he detested sauce of any sort—even catsup, on his steaks. He almost gagged when he tasted the salad they served; for it had a whiff of garlic about it and he had often said that he would

about as soon have a salad or meat flavored with creosote as with that champion stink-weed—garlic! The coffee was both weak and cold; so he only drank half a cup. For desert he ordered a piece of cocoanut pie; but only because he was sure that it was one that Lupe had baked and could not find room in the house trailer for it.

Before he had finished eating his pie, Mr. Dobbins pranced in with a sheaf of papers in his hand; and noticing the station operator from across the way, he nodded and managed to say: "How-do-you-do" then sat down on a stool far enough away to make sure that his spotlessly clean, carefully creased light grey suit would not touch Hi's soiled coveralls. Spreading the paper on the counter he assumed an air of importance, which belied the fact that it was nothing more secret or interesting than a rough diagram of a new U-shaped counter, that he was going to have installed to replace the oldfashioned straight one that Zenobia had secured at a bargain at a secondhand store. Suddenly Dobbins sprang off the stool, like a bantam rooster and "stepped" off the measurements of the room. Then he paused and, looking out through the big front window, stared for a moment, shook his head, looked displeased; and turning to Hi with a suddenness that caused him to jump and drop the last bit of pie from his fork, he said:

"Young man! your service station spoils the artistic possibilities of this cafe! To be at ease while enjoying his food, a customer should be able to look upon a beautiful painting, a bed of bright flowers, a clump of shrubbery or an unbroken sweep of the prairie instead of at a grease rack!"

Hi half turned on his stool to see if by any possible chance the man might be joking; then deciding that this man could scarcely be expected to tell or laugh at a joke, he snapped:

"Well Mister, the service station was here before Miss Starr moved this building where it stands now; and since I can't or don't intend to move my gas station, or even the grease rack, you might spin this building around—there's plenty of prairie visible from that direction!" Tossing the correct change onto the counter, but not leaving a penny for tips, he left the room; before the little man Dobbins, had a chance to make another remark which might goad him into snatching him up by the collar and giving him a good shaking.

He had kept a sharp look-out for the tow car's return with the disabled truck—hoping for some news of Zenobia; whether she had caught another ride or whether she had

been left on some lonely roadside or corner. Two other tow trucks came by; but neither was the one who had taken the house trailer away. By nine o'clock that evening, he was tired—both mentally and physically; and to add to his misery, the spicy sauce on the steak and the garlic in the salad, had given him a severe case of indigestion. His head ached and he felt dreadfully alone and unwanted. Fearing that a car with serious mechanical trouble would happen to stop and he might have to work far into the night, he locked the pumps, took a double dose of bromo-seltzer, turned out the lights, locked the service room door and dejectedly climbed the stairs leading to the room above. He locked the door, lowered the sashes on the uncurtained windows and locked them so that no one could enter as Zenobia had, then he sat down on the bench and removed his shoes and slammed them into the corner across the room in anger and just to do something to make a noise. He had to plod across the splintery and dusty floor in his bare feet in order to drop his money bag, his wallet and keys into the shoes—a precaution he had faithfully performed since Zenobia had climbed in through the window and doused water in his face to awaken him.

Now he stretched out on the cot and pulled the blanket, which Zenobia secretly described as a "bilious" colored plaid, up to his ears and tried to go to sleep; but no matter how he turned, he was not comfortable. His thoughts wandered to all the pleasant things he had said or heard since the girl and her father first came into his life; and that added to the feeling of nostalgia which caused him more discomfort than did his upset stomach. He floundered about on the narrow berth until long past midnight. The plaid blanket fell to the floor first on one side then on the other. Finally, he dozed for a few minutes, then he sprang up suddenly, thinking that he had only a bad dream. He stumbled to the window to look out and make sure that the big house trailer was still parked beside the lunchroom—then clasped his aching head in his hands and moaned when, by the moonlight, he saw the strange grey sedan, belonging to the Dobbins', standing almost exactly where Zenobia's trailer had stood—and he recalled that the seats in the sedan converted into a bed, so the daughter and her husband must be asleep there, so they would be handy to open the cafe in time for some early breakfast customers.

"I'll bet they add some garlic to the eggs they scramble!" he said to himself; and went back to the army cot and tried

again to find relief in slumber. At five o'clock, after only an hour of restful sleep, he was awakened by a car with a loud exhaust, which dashed up the highway and stopped with a screech and a sputter, near the cafe—then the definite voice of Mr. Dobbins calling to his wife and daughter and shouting orders concerning the breakfast menu.

"I might have expected this—that this little bantam begins crowing at daybreak!" Hi mumbled, as he looked at his wrist watch to see what time it was. As he lay back on the tousled pillow, he said in the direction of the cafe: "Well Mr. Cock-a-doodle-doo! You needn't include me on the garlic-scented bill of fare—from this day forward, I'm boycotting your place; and I've a darned good mind to make a huge sign which might read: "This dump is unfair to human stomachs," and attach it to Sylvia and drive around and around the place to scare away all unsuspecting customers who might not be aware of what they are getting into!"

True to his promise, he hoisted a prearranged signal, a sort of flag, made from a strip of an old green window shade that had once adorned the windows of his sleeping quarters, out beside the building; this was to let the farmer's son, who lived half mile away, know that his services were needed.

The young, ambitious boy took charge of the station at eight o'clock, while Hi drove back to the little town five miles away to get a new supply of bromo-seltzer and to eat breakfast.

He downed three cups of strong coffee; and remembering that he had a quart sized thermos bottle in the car, he got it and ordered it filled with more of the strong coffee, to drink at lunch time. Also taking a dozen doughnuts and six sandwiches, he drove back and tried to concentrate on the business of running a service station.

It seemed that every time he happened to glance in the direction of the lunchroom he saw Mr. Dobbins, either at the window or on the outside, looking disapprovingly at the gas station in general and at him in particular.

About two o'clock that afternoon, after Hi had sat down in the little roadster in plain sight of all the Dobbins family and ate a sandwich and drank a cup of coffee, Mr. Dobbins came prancing across the highway in a bellicose manner, like a young filly in an attempt to crowd all the other horses into the background. He marched right up to where Hi was at work, trying to locate a leak in a tube that a customer had discarded when he purchased a new one. He hoped to

sell this one for a dollar. The undersized man came to a halt directly in front of Hi and said, in a loud, insinuating voice:

"Business hasn't been very good today!—A more attractive place would sure remedy that!"

"Yeah!" Hi snapped, seemingly intent on finding the air leak in the black rubber tube—"Since when does a tire select a nifty looking service station before picking up a nail on the highway, or a gas tank be choosy about what the pump that has gasoline in it looks like!"

"Is this place for sale?" Dobbins asked, ignoring the rebuke.

"It might be. Why? Do you think it would look better if you owned it?"

"Oh by all means! I'd move that messy grease rack and that shabby shed under which you have your-er-ah- *conveyence* (?) parked, back there on the other side and I'd jolly well paint the place and put some shades or curtains at those two windows up there, instead of letting them remain there looking for all the world like a woodpecker's nest in a fence post!"

It was Hi's time to ignore the thrust; for the prospects of selling the service station, added impetus to the idea that had been forming in his mind. Three times since awakening that morning, he had been tempted to load his suitcase, golf bag and tool kit into the car, lock the station doors and pumps and start in pursuit of Zenobia.

"Do you have the cash to pay for it?"

"I certainly do! State your price and I'll either accept or decline—whichever my judgment tells me is best!"

"Very well," Hi replied in a take-it-or-leave-it tone, "Give me four hundred dollars and take over the balance I owe on it, which is two hundred and ten bucks, and the place is yours—woodpecker's nest included!"

"I accept your offer; and I'd like to take over at once!" Mr. Dobbins replied; and with the thrill of becoming foot-loose, causing him to literally walk on air, Hi dropped the damaged tube into the lengthwise half of an old oil drum, washed his hands and was ready to go into town to sign the necessary papers to close the deal. Mr. Dobbins placed his son-in-law in charge while they were absent. They were lucky in finding a Notary and getting their signatures witnessed, then they returned to the station.

Hi did not even bother to shave, take a sponge bath or eat a sandwich that he had been wanting, before he backed Sylvia out from under the shed beside the grease rack and

placed his tool kit in the cluttered luggage compartment. He went to the wash room and removed most of the grease and dirt smudges from his face and hands, before he raced up the rickety stairs and dropped the coveralls he wore to the floor, stepped into the trousers of his brown suit and put on the shirt that he had worn to the hospital a few nights ago. Now, that exciting night seemed like ages past. He did not take time to tie his necktie; but hung it around his neck—hoping to attend to several important details later, so he could present a respectable appearance when he overtook Zenobia a few hours hence. He closed and locked the suitcase, which still lay with the lid resting against the wall, and placed it on the bench and his brown coat and lighter brown hat on the top the luggage. Next he made a neat roll of the thin mattress and pillow and tied it at each end with a heavy cord and stood the bedroll against the wall beside the door; then picked up the plaid blanket, his golf bag and the big brown paper bag containing the sandwiches, doughnuts and the bottle of coffee that he had bought that morning, and flung the door open and carried them down stairs to the car.

The golf bag was placed in the rear of the car with the tool kit, spare tire and a five gallon can of gasoline that he had drawn after filling the tank to capacity. He didn't intend to be caught out in the country, fifty miles from nowhere, with an empty gas tank. He spread the blanket of many colors over the car seat to protect his "best" suit. The lunch bag was placed on the floor at the right of the gear posts. Then he ran back upstairs, folded the olive drab cot up and picking it and his coveralls, work shoes and cap—which he might need, but hoped that he wouldn't, in case he had a flat tire or engine trouble, in one hand and placing the brown hat on his head, he picked up the suitcase in the other hand and pausing only a moment to look over the dingy, empty room to make sure that he had overlooked nothing, he ran down the steps and deposited the suitcase in the luggage compartment. He closed the lid and locked it then climbed into the seat behind the wheel; and, remembering Zenobia's dislike for untidiness, he took time to drape his coat over the empty seat beside him, before he pressed the starter. Sylvia responded beautifully to his touch.

It was four o'clock on a sunny autumn afternoon when Hiram Hills drove out onto the highway in front of the Hills Service Station. Mr. Dobbins and his son-in-law were already busy with hammer and crowbar, demolishing the little

shed, made of scrap material, which had sheltered Sylvia during the past few months.

"I suppose old Dob will camouflage the grease rack with a lattice grill, potted plants and Japanese lanterns! Wow! is this place in for a face lifting job on a grand scale!" Hi thought, as he left the place where his business plans had begun to materialize. The place where he had met the most wonderful girl in the world and where his devotion to this girl, despite her stubborn ambitions, had caused him to dispose of the business which gave promise of providing a good living for him—and to start in pursuit of the girl!

Now he was actually on the way headed in the same direction that she had taken, he was not sure just how she would receive him—when and if, he succeeded in overtaking her east of the corner of Hollywood and Vine streets; but he decided that he would cross that bridge only when he came to it.

Excited and fearful of what might happen to Zenobia before he caught up with her, he urged the patched-up roadster to its utmost speed. On a country road he whizzed by two-middle-aged women who were standing beside their car, waving frantically for him to stop and help them repair the flat tire to which they pointed. At any other time, he would have responded gladly, in true gentlemanly fashion, replaced the tire and been of any other assistance that would have helped the stranded women; but this was an exception. His conscience smote him as he noted the look of disappointment on the matrons' faces as he passed them at high speed.

"Some chap who is more of a gentleman than I am right now, will come along presently and help them!" he assured himself as he stepped on the gas, sending Sylvia along the road with a burst of speed that surprised him. During the next two hours, the only time he slowed down, was at numerous service stations—especially those at fork or crossroads, where he made inquiries concerning a huge house trailer being pulled by a tow car from Clinton, Oklahoma, just about this time yesterday. He received an assortment of replies;

"Nope, I don't recollect no such trailer," "Sure Mack, I suppose it passed here—about a million of them things pass here every day!—but I ain't sure I seen the one you're lookin' for!" "Was yer wife runnin' away with th' tow car guy?" "Listen fellow! If the trailer was stolen, I'd advise you to notify the law—they'd spot it in a minnit!" were some of the answers he got.

Then, as an added fly in his ointment, Sylvia became tempermental, at least that was what he would have said on any other occasion, had she started acting up as she did now. The starter wouldn't start, after he had stopped suddenly to prevent hitting an elderly man who was crossing the road ahead of him. Then the little car shimmied and shivered, coughed and sputtered, did a rhumba that made Hi's teeth chatter as if he had a bad case of ague; and, as he had often remarked, the car did just about everything that a donkey could or would do except bray, eat oats—and balk. Then, as he climbed a steep, winding stretch of road, the car did just that! No matter how much gas he did or did not give it, or whether the switch was off or on, there wasn't a sound from the motor.

"If that meter is correct, I have gone only one hundred miles; and Sylvia is already a nervous wreck!" he mumbled as he got out and raised the squeaky hood and peered inside at the little motor that huddled under the battered covering. He began prodding at the different parts as a doctor does in attempting to locate the sore spots in a patient's stomach. He could have worked better had he been dressed in the comfortable coveralls; but he hoped to correct the trouble without soiling his hands and clothes too much; thereby saving time required to change or wash up.

The minutes dragged by and he had gone over every conceivable part of the engine and ignition parts, but still had failed to locate the trouble. Cars, trucks and a brigade of motorcycles, headed for the races at Guthrie, passed with a deafening roar. He raised his head from under the hood when he heard an approaching motorist honking loudly; and instantly, two grinning female occupants were giving him the merry horse laugh as they found the same, unobliging man who had passed them and their flat tire a few hours ago, having trouble with his broken-down car!

Finally, he discovered a broken wire, quickly repaired it and, closing the hood and patting it apologetically, for having said, or even thought that Sylvia was anything except a reliable and obedient car, he took an old shirt, which he had kept to clean the headlights and windshield with, and dampened a corner of it from the extra can of gasoline and cleaned his hands. Then he was off—determined to make up for the precious time he had lost.

He was well aware that the tow car's destination was a service station near Amarillo; but he had no idea which side or on what road it was located. At eight o'clock in the

evening, after inquiring at five stations, he finally located the station on the outskirts of Amarillo, where the attendant told him that the tow car had unhooked from the house trailer and picked up the disabled truck and left. "I'm sure this was the trailer you're looking for, because there was the prettiest girl in it, I've seen in a long time—And she wasn't dumb or helpless like most pretty dames; she had sense and knew how to use it—yes, she knew what she was doing!" Was the manner in which the man described Zenobia.

"Did the trailer remain here all night?" Hi asked, hoping that it had, so the distance between them would be greatly minimized.

"Oh no!" the attendant replied, "I promised the driver of the tow car that I'd watch out for someone going west who might pull the trailer for the young lady; and I did. The first three people I asked, refused outright—then a smart-alec traveling man who had heard me ask one party to pull the trailer, told me he'd pull it; but I said 'Nothin' doin' Mister, the lady's trailer was practically left in my care and I'm not turning it over to you—No sir, not by a jugful!' He tried to insist, then he noticed the big Stillson wrench that I grasped in my right fist and he cast a wicked eye in the direction of the trailer and, from the look in his eyes, I knew that he was going to make some sort of nasty remark about the girl, so I says: 'Don't say it Mister! This wrench in my hand don't like to hear remarks about young ladies any better than I do! Now away with you!' And he jumped into his car and lit out!"

"Good for you! I'm very grateful to both you and your trusty monkey wrench!" Hi said, as he grasped the man's hand with one hand and patted him on the back with the other, "Now tell me, did you find a reliable appearing driver to pull the trailer and what time did all this happen?"

"At nine fifteen—I remember the time, for I had just finished listening to my favorite news broadcast on the radio. They told about the plane crash in the east, when a big eight cylinder club coupe pulled in. Before I asked, I sized up the occupants, engaged them in conversation to find out where they were going and things like that. They were a middle-aged man and wife, fairly prosperous looking and, judging by their appearance, they were an average couple and could be trusted. I learned that they were headed for San Bernardino, California, where they owned some property! I decided that here was a real chance for the young

lady, so I asked them if they would consider pulling the trailer. They hesitated a moment—then I told them that the owner of the trailer would pay them whatever it was reasonably worth for their services. The man wanted to know how much extra weight the big coach would add to his car and having once owned a trailer and having read up on the different models and how much weight they added, I told him that the way this trailer was balanced, it would not add more than two hundred pounds to his rear axle. Then he wanted to know whether this four wheeled job would be more difficult to pull than a two wheeler, and I explained to him that this was no ordinary trailer—that it was built to order, on scientific designs and of the very best materials available and that it probably cost the original owner a cool six thousand dollars. Then the Missus chimed in and asked if the lady had the cash with which to pay them; and I said I was sure she did, for I had arranged to cash a traveler's cheque for her."

"How much did they charge her to take the trailer to California?" Hi asked when the man paused in his recital of events of the night before.

"One hundred and fifty dollars—but the young lady did not object, she didn't seem to think that the sum was unreasonable and was glad to pay them. I cashed her cheque and watched her hand them the money; then the big coupe hooked on and away they went! I wouldn't be at all surprised if they aren't in California by this time—for I overheard them say that they would drive day and night until they got there."

"One hundred and fifty dollars! Whew! Well thanks fellow; the lady was er-a friend of mine and I was a bit worried about her starting out like that. I appreciate your kindness to her. Thanks again and goodbye; I must be going!"

Hi started the car and headed west. As he skirted the edge of town the sum of one hundred and fifty dollars kept appearing in his mind. He knew that that much took a big portion of Zenobia's ready cash; and he kept asking himself whether *he* would charge a person—any person, one hundred and fifty dollars to tow a trailer to the place he was going any way; and the answer was always NO! He tried to convince himself that there was no cause for worry; that she had paid in advance and was assured of getting to California without any more hitches and halts. However, he still experienced a vague feeling of uneasiness; and he was dreadfully tired—and it suddenly occurred to him that he had

eaten nothing since that hasty early lunch snack of one sandwich.

An hour out of Amarillo, he decided to stop and eat, so he parked the car in a clear space about fifty feet from the highway at the crest of a hill. The moon was out and the autumn air was cool. After he had eaten one sandwich and drank two cups of coffee, he decided that he was actually more sleepy than hungry. The effects of the Dobbins' steak and salad had left his stomach as skittish about food as a young thoroughbred is of a bridle.

Just knowing that Zenobia was on her way and was reported to be in trustworthy hands, was like removing the sharp instrument that had prodded him. He felt so drowsy that he decided it would be dangerous for him to attempt to drive further without sleep—why he might fall asleep at the wheel! And he shuddered when he thought of being injured, or killed without ever knowing for sure that Zenobia had reached California safely; besides, he warned himself, she might have an accident, or something happen to her while on the way, she might send a message to the filling station back on 66 telling him that he was needed! He decided that the more sensible thing to do would be to take the army cot from the car, set it up so he could stretch out and relax and get a couple of hours sleep before proceeding—then, when he was rested, he would urge Sylvia to her top speed in an effort to overtake the house trailer, the big coupe — and Zenobia!

He set the cot up under a small tree with the roadster between him and the highway. When he looked in the car for the roll of bedding, the rays of his flashlight failed to reveal any signs of the roll that he had placed against the wall beside the door in his former sleeping room. Suddenly he straightened up, switched off the light and standing there alone on the moonlit hill, he said savagely:

"Why you dolt! You opened the door and walked out leaving the bedroll behind the dad-ratted door!"

He still had the plaid blanket, which covered the seat, so he took it off and was in the act of wrapping it around him and lying down on the cot with his brown suit on, when he thought of how displeased Zenobia would be if he rushed into her presence in a wrinkled suit. So he carefully spread half of the blanket over the canvas cot, leaving the other half to cover with; then he began removing his clothes. He placed his coat, shirt and tie on the coat hanger that he had

brought along with his coat. As he started to remove his trousers, he noticed, by the dim light of the moon, a spot of grease on one leg, just above the knee. Stifling a yawn, he picked up the flashlight and found a clean corner on the old shirt in the luggage compartment, poured some gasoline from the can on it, removed the grease spot and hung the trousers across the open door of the car, to allow the odor of gasoline to escape while he rested.

Dutifully obeying Zenobia's admonitions to hide his money while he slept, he slid his billfold, which contained over seven hundred dollars in cash, into one of his brown oxfords and then stuffed his socks in on top of it, then he stretched his weary frame out on the cot and pulled the blanket around him. He looked up at the moon that was dipping farther to the west; and with a boyish grin, he whispered:

"Mr. Moon, tell her not to hurry—that I'm on my way to join her in that promised land—that land of milk and honey, avocados, movie stars, grapefruit, singers, prunes, walnuts, bathing beauties, lemons, celebrities, oranges, song writers, raisins, senators, lettuce, retired millionaires—gee! They grow a lot of things in California; no wonder it is such a big state! But there's just two things that's kept me guessing for some time—I'd probably be called a big ignoramus if I asked what they are, so I'll just wait until I get out there, then I'm going to keep my ears and my eyes open and my mouth shut and maybe I can find out what it is that they cook in them smudge pots that I've heard mentioned in jokes. Don't remember having ever tasted anything called "smudge"! Oh well, perhaps they mean *fudge* pots; but what I would really like to know is whether they use high powered rifles, bows and arrows or some kind of dogs when they hunt for GRUNION!"

He glanced at his wristwatch and was assured that it was only ten p.m. instead of midnight. Two hours of sleep should put him in good shape for the final dash to California, even if he did have to hurdle the Rocky Mountains on the way. He enjoyed the ease of relaxation; and kept telling himself that he must awaken in two hours. He could spare no more time than that. Somewhere he had read that this sort of autosuggestion had proven reliable to those who have control over their mind. He was positive that he knew exactly what he wanted and that he was master of his faculties. The bad taste, caused by the spicy sauce and salad, had disappeared and his body felt blissfully at ease. Sleep was crowding the worries far back into his mind and with a half

audible: "I *must* awaken—in—two—hours!" he sank into a deep slumber.

Late drivers passing on the highway, noticed the small roadster and, until the moon dipped over the distant mountain peaks, they could see the outline of the man asleep on the cot. Many wished that they were in his place. One couldn't understand why he hadn't selected a more secluded spot and still another was half tempted to stop and join him in getting some much-needed rest.

Chapter Six

HIGHWAY ADVENTURES

A FEW OF THE great number of truck drivers who haul merchandise over the many highways linking the two coasts and the Canadian and Mexican borders, will pick up an occasional hitch-hiker in order to give the unfortunate fellow a lift, or to have some one to talk to during long, monotonous drives. During the war, a service man could get a free ride to almost any place he wished to go. Many drivers are prohibited by their employers from picking up riders; while some just don't like to pick up strangers—like the driver of a load of hardware from Amarillo to a small store seventy miles west on 66. As he followed the curving highway, outlined by his powerful headlights at a medium speed which was calculated to be safe for everyone on the highway, he cautiously passed each crossroad or other place where there was danger of colliding the heavily laden truck with another vehicle. On a stretch of level road, he was passed by an unloaded truck which blinked his light as a signal to his fellow driver, that he had excess baggage aboard—which meant that someone was hooking a ride.

The driver of the load of hardware stopped at the foot of the hill he was approaching and, with a flashlight in one hand and a ball-peen hammer in the other, he walked around to the rear of the truck where he found two transients, one of whom was none too clean, sprawled on the four feet of empty floor space that had been left after the full load had been placed well forward to provide the proper balance to the truck. Both men were sound asleep and quite safe from falling overboard, by the tie ropes which were looped over the crates and bundles then down to the iron rings on the edge of the truck bed. Neither sleeper stirred as the driver

flashed the beam of the flashlight over their tattered clothes and unshaven faces; but when he landed four blistering hot-foot blows in quick succession on four poorly shod feet, the two vagabonds sat upright and grabbed for their feet; peering out between the picket-like strands of rope. One of the men yelled:

"Hey! cut dat out! Whad-ye' tryin't' do, cripple me for life?" While the other moaned:

"Oh me foot! Hit right smack-dab in de big hole in me shoe!"

The driver hung his lantern on a stanchion clip and, with the hammer gripped firmly in his right hand, he reached in and yanked the men to the ground and said:

"The railroad is over there about a mile! Go on over there with the rest of the bums!"

"Say listen! You big bully! *We* don't 'sociate wid dem common railroad bums—we's gen'lemen—an' don't ye fergit dat!" The younger and the cleanest, and the first one to balance hmslf on his feet, exclaimed in injured dignity.

"All right! Bums or gentlemen, stay off my truck or I'll turn you over to the highway patrol!" the driver warned. Mounting his cab he drove away up the dark highway, leaving the two knights of the road by the wayside, with only four aching feet to travel on.

"*What* d' we do now Grabby?" one of the men asked timidly.

"Don't worry Soapy! We'll make out. First, let's walk on t' d' top o' dat hill an' see what's on 'thother side!"

They shuffled on. The hard pavement felt still harder to their bruised feet. Soapy attempted to waik on the soft shoulder of sand and gravel, but the gaping hole in one of his shoe soles allowed sharp gravel to cut his foot, so they stayed on the pavement. A hundred yards further and half-way up the hill, Soapy asked:

"How fer did you'se say it wuz t' Cal'fornie?"

"Well Soapy, that sign acrosst there says it's fifty-two mile back t' Amalilly; so, t' be jes 'bout e'zact—accordin' t' my cal'lashions, it's 'round twelve hunnard miles t' Los Ang-lees frum where we are right now!"

"Twelve hun'ard miles!" Soapy moaned, "Gosh-all-hem-lock Grabby! I hope it ain't all up hill, an' on foot!"

"Aw stop worryin' an' complainin'! Ain't I all'ays managed t' git ye out'n ever other jam we got int'? I all'ays say dat ever thin' happ'ns fer th' best. Why who knows, mebbe a truck loaded wid innerspring mat'erses an' wid a nice cover

over it an' headin' straight fer Los Ang-lees, will come by!"

"Er a highway p'trolman, an' we git t'rowed in de jug ag'in!" Soapy suggested ominously.

"Aw fer cat's sake Soapy! Yer jes scared you'll land in a decent lock-up an' will have t' take a bath—lak ye did in Fillie-delfie six mont's ago!"

Soapy was tired, sleepy and longed for a friendly haystack or a convenient culvert where they could find a sheltered and safe place from the law, to sleep. He pulled the tattered grey coat about his thin body. The baggy old jeans had to be turned up almost a foot; and a rough place in the floor of the hardware truck had ripped a five inch gash in the seat; and since both knees were worn through, there was scant chance of him standing in any position in which a portion of his skinny body did not show. The shoes he wore, and which he had discovered in a trash barrel in East St. Louis several weeks ago, were at least two sizes too small for his big, size ten feet. To allow himself to walk with more comfort, he had cut holes to permit his big toes to protrude and the rest of his feet from being mercilessly pinched. A drab corduroy cap with a drooping visor and dangling earflaps almost covered his shaggy, mouse-colored hair which hung in sticky strands to the soiled and frayed collar of an old blue chambray shirt. Neither time nor nature had stamped any definite age signs on him; but it would have been safe to guess that he was anywhere between forty and fifty years old.

The other wayfarer was definitely in the forty to fifty bracket. His once blonde hair was streaked with grey and darker tones; as often happen to men after they pass their fortieth birthday. Grabby was alert—ever on the lookout for a free ride, a generous handout or a sure bet on a horse that possessed any appearance or claims of a race-track winner. He was always scheming, planning and waiting for the day when he would "clean up" on some race or rare deal and could "retire" and maybe become the owner of a race horse.

The word "clean up" which Grabby used so freely and so often, sent chills of horror over Soapy's dust and sweat-coated body; and once when his partner was trying to pierce together some of his plans, he had remarked:

"Gosh a-mighty Grabby! You make me all tir'd an' wor' out jes watchin' an' list'nin' t' ye think an' talk s' hard!"

Grabby was more careful about his appearance. His coat of light blue tweed and trousers of navy blue serge were less soiled and wrinkled than those of his partner. The two-toned shoes of canvas and brown leather were cracked and

scuffed, and the grey felt had had a crease in the crown and the front of the brim snapped down at a becoming angle. At least once a week, they would stop at a stream, lake or reservoir and, if the weather was fair, Grabby would remove his clothes and using a bar of soap or a small bottle of liquid soap which he had purloined from a public washroom, he would wash his underwear, shirt, socks and his handkerchief if he was fortunate enough to have one, and hang them on a wire fence or a tree limb to dry while he bathed and shampooed his hair. He would then carefully shave with the old razor and the piece of broken mirror that he carried in his pocket. It was on very rare occasions, and the weather had to be extremely warm, when Soapy joined in this ritual of cleanliness—he usually took a nap or wandered about in search of food.

The two foot-sore hikers finally arrived at the crest of the hill where the moon shone on the parked roadster. They paused respectfully about fifty yards away, to see whether the car contained lovers who might wish to be alone or whether the driver was only resting. It was far past midnight, in the wee sma' hours of the morning when drivers on regular routes, passed this particular spot and few all-night drivers were on the road.

As they stood listening for sounds of conversation from the car, the stillness of the night was broken by the soft chirrup of many crickets, of a mocking bird going through his repertoire and of the spontaneous snores of Hiram Hills who was sound asleep on the army cot beside the car. The two shabbily dressed men looked at each other in the wan light and smiled. Grabby whispered: "Sh-u! Dis ain't no love-boids nest we found—an' t'ain't no mares nest neither! Dat guy's sleepin' so sound I doubt's if a dozen toots from Gabriell's horn would wake him!"

"Gabby," Soapy asked, "What's a mare's nest?"

"Never mind! I'll e'splain dat later—right now, dar's more important things t' 'tend t'!"

"What fer in'st'unce? We ain't goin' t' wake up dis guy an as't him t' take us to Cali'fornee are we Grabby?"

Grabby ignored his companion's questions; as the leader of the expedition he was doing some fast thinking. He ventured closer to the man on the cot and made a quick estimate of the situation; even in the moonlight, the car, Sylvia, was no beauty. Her age, makeup and lack of paint stood out quite plainly. Grabby's nimble mind was quick to grasp the possibilities that this unexpected situation offered to him and

his pal. He whispered to Soapy to be ever so cautious.

Hi's snores continued as Grabby stepped closer to the sleeping man and, noticing the pair of polished brown shoes sitting beside the cot, he followed the habit which had won for him the name "Grabby". Picking up one of them, he brushed his frayed coat sleeve across the slightly dusty toe and, as he balanced himself on one foot, he slipped the other foot out of the worn brown and white shoes and tried on the new brown shoe. The fit was so perfect that he stepped out of the other old shoe and picked up the second brown shoe. He removed Hi's socks and when he tried to push his foot in, he discovered the well-padded wallet.

Grabby straightened the wallet out until he could see a sheaf of greenbacks in the folder, then he quickly thrust it into his inside coat pocket. Putting on the other shoe and, nudging Soapy, who was going through the familiar process of exchanging his very badly worn shoes for the ones Grabby had just discarded, he motioned him to get to the right side of the windshield of the parked car and to push. Grabby had snatched Hi's brown pants off the edge of the open car door where they had been placed to air and prevent wrinkling, and began searching for the car keys. Unable to find them or hear them jingle, he took a close look at the weatherbeaten dash and discovered them hanging, ready to be turned and start the ignition.

Casting a look of utter dismay in Hi's direction, he whispered:

"Dat poor guy needs a governess, a noismaid an' a body-guard!" Then he walked around to the other side of the roadster and they began to push the car ever so quietly over the smooth ground, onto the highway. As it started down the slight grade, both men climbed in. Grabby laid Hi's brown coat and trousers across his lap, grasped the wheel and stepped on the gas. The motor purred softly speeding the car around a curve and on westward.

"Don't s'pose th' law'd hang a feller fer takin' a junk-heap like dis—eh, Soapy?" Grabby said, as he steered with one hand while he frisked the pockets of Hi's coat and pants to see what other valuables he could find. The search produced a good fountain pen, two packages of chewing gum, three clean white handkerchiefs and one dollar and seventeen cents in small change.

When they had put about five miles between them and the man on the cot, Grabby stopped the car and snapped on the flashlight which had lain on the seat between them. He

opened the wallet, looked inside, sniffed the paper money to see if it had that certain "money" smell or whether it just might happen to be stage money. The scent was real and he flicked the sheaf of precious paper; then extracted them and thumbed through them and exclaimed to Soapy, who had slumped down on the other end of the seat and was thankful—just to be rid of the broken shoe, and to be riding, even if it was in as sorry a looking car as Sylvia was:

"Jehosaphat's ghost! Look Soapy, they's nearly seven hundred bucks in dis wallet! Glory be! Am I glad dat truck driver put us off'n his wagon when he did! O'derwise, we'd a passed dis golden op'tunity! Dey say op'tunity knocks only onc't on a man's door—well, dis time he practily busted it down so's t' let us in on dis deal!"

"But Grabby, what'll dat guy back dar do? We has not only got his car an' money; but also his coat an' breeches. I don't know whether he was even wearin' any o' dem fancy pee-jamers er not!"

"Now don't waste time worryin' about *him*! Like as not, he's got plenty o' money in a bank som'ers—er he'll write t' his folks for more! Th' poor sap! He must be dum'er than dum' t' leave a poise full o' money in his shoe—he shoulda' knowed dat some dirty thief would'a—"

"Now listen here Grabby! You'se is th' thief—it wuz yo'r idee t' snatch th' car an' ever'thin' else!" Soapy remonstrated; not particularly opposed to being referred to as "dirty", but resentful of being termed a thief.

"All right! I'll 'ssume th' blame—which also gives me th' right t' carry th' cash an' spend it anyway an' fer anything I deem fit, an' t' own, drive an' possess th' car an' t' wear t'h clothes—an' right now is where I b'gin attendin' t' several important details!" he said, as one who considered himself master of the situation. He got out of the car and walked around to the sheltered side where he removed his coat, shirt and pants, transferred the wallet back into Hi's brown pants pocket, then tossed the threadbare clothing in Soapy's direction, while he slipped into Hi's suit. It fit him much better than the two toned blue clothes he had been wearing. By the time he had tied Hi's necktie and creased the new hat to suit him, Soapy had discarded his rags and had donned the clothes that his partner had just removed.

Grabby jingled the loose change in his pocket and felt to make sure that the hip pocket was buttoned over the fat wallet. Being in a generous mood, he counted out one dollar in small coins and handing them to Soapy he said in a

kindly, patronizing voice:

"Here pal is some spending money! I know from exper'nce dat it lifts a man's morale t' have some money in his pockets t' jingle!"

"Tanks Grabby! for de money an' de clothes—I feel's a lot better already!"

"Dat's jes fine! But Soapy, d'ye 'member dat pic'ure in d' ol' mag-zine what I showed ye dat day when you wouldn' take a bath in de creek after I'd snitched 'nough soap frum d' bus station t' wash us an' our duds wid?"

"D' ye mean where a lot o' guys an' guls wuz a whisperin' b'hind 'nother guy's back while he sat lookin' sad an' kinda lonesome?"

"Yep dat's d' one! An' now Soapy, as fr'en' t' fr'en', I'm goin' t' speak mighty plain t' you's! We're headed for Cal-fornee where a lot o' nice people lives an' one has t' watch one's 'pearances an' try t' 'pear in public clean an'—an' *well m'ticulated!*"

"Grabby, is ye tryin' t' tell me dat I should ought'a wash all over as often as onc't a week—like you all'ays do?"

"Ye guessed it Soapy! So, when we get t' Cal-fornee, where it's all'ays warm an' sunshiny, ye won't need t' worry 'bout gettin' cold 'er takin' th' sniffles when we go bathin' in th' crick er th' river!"

"Grabby! I'm 'fraid ye won't find much water out there t' wash in. They's plenty in th' ocean; too much fer safety an' too salt t' wash clothes in! I know, 'cause a while back, I met a feller what'd jest bummed his way from Cal-fornee; an' d'ye know what he told me?"

"No, what did he tell ye—dat ever'body had a swimmin' pool in their back yard?"

"Naw!" Soapy replied firmly, quite convinced that what he had heard was the truth, "He said that th' rivers an' cricks wuz s' dry th' frogs never got a chanc't t' learn how t' swim!"

Grabby gave the man beside him a look of genuine pity, then remarked:

"Well, ye'll have t' admit dat dis is better'n walkin' eh, don't ye Soapy?" as the car sped over the road; and headed west at that.

"Ye-s, so fer it's all right; but I got a feelin' dat d' guy back dar 'sleep ain't goin' t' like it one bit when he wakes up an' finds everythin' gone—'spec'ly his pants! An' sure as shootin', he'll tell th' law sooner er later!"

"Now don't ye worry 'bout th' law! If ye'll stop t' think,

he don't know what we look like—how many of us they wuz, which d'rect'un we went—in fact m' fr'en' he's goin' t' have one heck'uve a time convincin' any lawman dat what act'-shully happe'nd *did* hap'n-like somebody onc't said: 'Truth is stranger den fict'shun!' Now Soapy, me pal, jes r'lax an' enjoy d' trip! Why, dis is th' break I've been wantin' an' waitin' an' waitin' fer all m' life! Fate must'a planned all dis 'spec'ly fer us! Tell ye what Soapy, when we gits t' Los Angeles, I'm goin' t' give ye th s'prise o' yer life! Next week, Bang Crosby's horses is a goin' t' run, an' I'll make a real killin', a cleanup that'll amaze ye, er m' name ain't Grabby!"

"Bettin' on horses is risky biz-ness!" Soapy warned listlessly.

"'Tain't if ye know horses—an' I prides m'self on knowin' th' qual'f'cashons o' any horse on four laigs—an' I'm 'spec'ly int'rested in Bangs steeds!"

They passed through two small towns; in one of which a night patrolman, standing on a street corner, paid no particular attention to them.

"Guess there ain't been no broadcasts 'bout a stolen car, er else that cop'd a rec'nized this'n!" Grabby vouchshafed.

"Don't s'pose dat guy has woke up yet—so he don't know he's lost his car an' ever'thin'—Grabby, I still say ye should'a left his breeches—dat wuz d' meanest part o' d' trick y' played on him!"

"Will ye stop worryin' 'bout dat babe in de woods back dar? Some good fairy'll come t' his rescue! Now get busy an' see what's in dat paper bag down b'side yer feet."

Soapy reached under the dash and removed the big kraft bag and, placing it carefully on his knees, he opened the top of the bag, sniffed at the smell of food, then flashed the beam of the flashlight inside and exclaimed:

"Holy cow Grabby! Der's one o' dem termatic jugs an'—yes sir! san'witches an, oh boy! doughunts! Yum-yum, food an' lots o' it!"

Grabby steered the roadster to one side of the road and shut off the motor and the two hungry men unwrapped a sandwich and began to eat.

Soapy, who sagged on his half of the seat, held his sandwich with both hands and gnawed away with his badly decayed teeth; while Grabby, in exalted pride, clamped a thumb and forefinger over a stack of two slices of bread and a thick filling of roast beef. He crooked the other three fingers in a

dainty pose as he sat up straight and stiff as Hitler on parade, and exclaimed:

"Beef san'wiches—m' fav'rite food!"

"Mine's cheese an' that's my choice!" Soapy mumbled; as his friend picked up the flashlight and opened the rusty catch on the glove compartment. Reaching in and removing three full and a half pack of cigarettes, he gasped:

"My, my! Fortune ain't merely smilin' on us—why Soapy, she's laughin' out loud!" After further rummaging in the little niche, he found a road map; and by the beam of the flashlight, discovered that it was folded so that Highway 66 was exposed—pointing like beckoning fingers across desert and mountains to the Pacific ocean.

"In th' mornin', when we can see better, we'll plan our eyetenary!" Grabby announced; and the two adventurers washed down two sandwiches and three doughnuts apiece, with coffee from the thermos jug—which was only lukewarm. Then they were on their way again—to the warm weather—and the stable of race horses in the west!

Chapter Seven

A SORRY PREDICAMENT

WEARINESS from many hours of work and loss of sleep caused by worrying over the fate of the girl he loved, then the relief he felt at learning that she was happily on her way, and that he was following her, caused Hi to fall into a deep slumber—which was made even more pleasant by dreams of Zenobia. The pre-dawn chilliness of the night, made him draw the plaid blanket closer about him.

At last he began to feel warm—then too warm; and he turned over on his other side to keep the heat from striking him in the face. The sun was casting its warm rays over the tops of boulders and dwarf trees, as passing motroists looked curiously at the man asleep on the Army cot only a few yards from the highway and with no car, tent or other object in sight. The morning traffic became heavier and the hands on Hi's wristwatch, which, fortunate for him, he had left on his arm, pointed to seven twenty. The warmth of the sun, which penetrated the blanket, caressed his shoulders and spine. He squirmed with pleasure, like a pig getting his back scratched;

and would have lapsed into another period of sound sleep had not the driver of a Greyhound bus approached, and the driver who was curious to know whether the cot contained a drunk just sleeping it off or it might possibly be a dead man or maybe a dummy placed there for a joke, sounded a prolonged blast on the horn.

The bus, with smoke billowing from the racing motor, thundered by. Hi sat up suddenly and in time to see the passengers on the bus waving from many of the windows. He rubbed his eyes in bewilderment.

"What in tarnation am I doing out here? Is this a gag of some kind!" he asked himself, as he flung the blanket back and started to stand up. By this time he was awake enough to realize that he was clad only in what the Navy had taught him to call "Skivvies", which in this instant was a sleeveless, white cotton undershirt and shorts of a weird mixture of deep blue, bright red and yellow and daubs of purple, such colors and patterns as might be caused by lightning striking a barber pole on a dark night. He heard a car approaching, so he pulled the blanket around him and sat down on the edge of the cot and rested his befuddled head in his hands, then he sprang up again and gasped:

"Sylvia! Sylvia is gone! And—oh my gosh! my clothes are gone!" He reached for his hip pocket where he usually carried his wallet, but there being no pockets of any kind in the riotous colored shorts, he swallowed hard, hissed savagely, sank back onto the cot and reached for his shoes—especially the one containing his wallet. His trembling hand came up with a pair of old black shoes instead! There were holes in the toes where the leather had been cut away, and one of them had a hole in the sole which had been worn there by many miles of tramping over the wandering roads—but there was no wallet in either of them. Dropping them as if they had been a couple of dead rats, he wiped his hand on the edge of the blanket and continued to moan:

"My money is gone! Now I'll never find Zenobia! I'll never get to California and—I c-can't just hide here among the rocks forever—but maybe I'll have to!"

Strangely enough, he recalled Zenobia's warning, or prediction, that morning when she had awakened him, that some day a thief would pull the cot from under him and escape without awakening him. For an instant, he suspected that she might have changed her mind and returned and, seeing him fast asleep beside the road, had decided to play a

trick on him or teach him a lesson in a manner he would never forget. He soon discarded this explanation of his plight as being too remote and too fantastical to be considered; but to convince himself and to try to discover what might have happened, he tucked the blanket about him, tried to stand up and when the sharp gravel and the sandburrs hurt his feet, he sat down and gingerly picked up one of the old shoes. "They might be a little better than walking on the rocks and stickers!" he mumbled hopelessly, as he viewed the hole in the sole with a skeptical sigh; then seized with a sudden inspiration, he tore the leather tongue from the shoe and placed it inside to cover the hole in the sole.

"There! that scrap of leather will be more serviceable there! Now maybe I can hobble out to the roadside and get a ride to some place where I can report the theft of Sylvia, my clothes and my wallet!"

The shoes had been as much too small for Soapy's generous-sized feet as they were now too large for Hi's seven and a half B. He wiggled his big toes where they peeked through the vents in the toes; a style and a fad that had proven so comfortable by the ladies. The frayed edges of the white canvas lining around the uneven slashes attested to the clumsiness of the remodeling job. Grudgingly, he tied the laces, one of which was a knotted piece of brown shoe lace—scraps from Grabby's shoes when he had discovered a better pair, and the other, a length of binder twine which he had found while sleeping in a straw stack in a Kansas wheat field.

There wasn't a car in sight as he stumbled to his feet and began looking for tracks of person or car which ever it was that kidnapped Sylvia. Only the dim outline of men's shoes followed on either side of the tracks of the car to the highway; where all were swallowed up in the trackless surface of the paved road.

He shuffled back to the cot; which was the only familiar or friendly object in sight. He sat down and, pounding his fists upon his bare knees, he moaned:

"I've got to get away from here! I must have some clothes! I'm thirsty! I'm hungry! I'll go mad or starve—or both!" After making a valiant effort to calm himself so he could think rationally, he continued: "Maybe I'd better flag the next car I see and explain what happened! No, I'm not so sure—they'd be sure to think that I am drunk or crazy; and how would I ever convince them that I'm not? But—that's it! I'll pretend that I'm a bit off the beam, let them

pick me up, have a test or trial or whatever it is they do to find out why and how crazy people are—they'll give me some clothes of some kind and—but that's enough thinking. Now for some dramatic acting!"

He attempted to get into the proper mood by rumpling his already disheveled hair. He assumed a blank, gaping expression with his mouth and a wild, searching look in his eyes; and decided to add flavor to the role by grasping the blanket with one hand while he waved the other naked arm as he shouted:

"I'm Caesar! Where's Anthony and Syl—I mean Cleopatra!" He paused suddenly in the midst of the dramatic rehearsal, when he happened to think:

"No! No that would never do! It would take weeks—they might decide that I *am* goofy and put me in a padded cell and not even allow me to write to Zenobia! Oh, good night! what *will* I do? I can't hold up a car with nothing that looks like a gun and with this — this *rag* wrapped around me! I wish there was something less dangerous and serious—Ah, let's see! Now I have an idea! I'll see for myself whether people are funny, if they are sympathetic and helpful, like that radio program says they are. If there ever was a person who needs sympathy and HELP, then I, Hiram Hills am that person! Sure! they'll think it is some kind of a gag and will string along! Ah! now I'm cooking on all four burners! I'll pretend that I've been sent on a scavenger hunt and have to borrow a pair of trousers, waist size 32, inseam 31, with a stuffed billfold in the pockets! Oh good! there comes a likely car up the hill right now!"

He girded himself in the blanket—one corner trailing, and stumbled toward the highway, as sure-footed as the broken shoes would allow. The black sedan slowed down a bit as it neared the top of the hill. The occupants stared at the figure approaching the road. The expressions on the faces of the two men and two women passengers left no doubt in Hi's mind as to what they suspected. There were wild shrieks from the women and the car lunged forward as he was left standing alone. It was only then that he remembered that he had left his hair in a wild looking, tousled mass—and he was positive that the people in the car had seen a strange, unintelligent look on his face—for he had forgotten to relax!

For lack of anything better to do, he hobbled back to the cot and sat down and tried to think clearly. It occurred to him that the folks in the car might report to some law enforcement officer of having seen a crazy man beside the high-

way; in such a case, an alarm would be sent out and he would be picked up and either put in jail or sent to a mental institution. In the meantime, he must keep trying. Perhaps if he could only get a ride to the nearest clothing store, he could trade his watch for some kind of clothes—if nothing more than a pair of jeans, a blue shirt and a pair of shoes with soles over all the bottoms. Suddenly he recalled what a psychology teacher had often said: "Now remember class, a smile will accomplish much more than a frown!"

He knew from experience, that this was true. While in the Navy, he had had to practically turn his face inside out to smile while receiving a dressing-down by a member of the brass section! At the service station, he had often smiled when he would much rather have heaved a monkey wrench at a customer. He certainly did not feel like smiling now—he could not think of one single thing that he should smile, or even grin at—until his natural sense of humor came to his rescue and he said to himself:

"Well, if I could see me as I must look from the road, I would either smile or have the daylights scared out of me—SO, if it requires a smile to get me out of this confounded mess—well *that* is one thing that barney thief didn't steal! So here goes!"

He smoothed his hair as best he could with the tips of his fingers; then twiddled himself under the chin, stood up and draped the blanket, Grecian fashion, around his body. With an abashed smile on his face, he tripped blithely out to the roadside, just as a light pickup truck came up the hill with the rising sun. Hi noticed that there was only the driver in the car—a man about his own age. Coyly placing one forefinger to his beaming face and thrusting a hairy shin, which was encircled midway by a garter which he had not removed from his sock, from under the fold of the blanket, the other hand resting alluringly on his hip, he advanced to meet the car.

The driver of the little truck looked suspiciously, then curiously at the figure beside the road; then from pure inquisitiveness, he applied the brakes and stopped the car, shifted his hat back from his forehead and felt to make sure that the little revolver, which he had obtained permission to carry, was within easy reach on the seat beside him.

"Good morning sir!" Hi called cheerfully. "Would you risk your life by giving me a lift to the nearest store? The darndest thing happened to me last night!"

"Been playing strip-poker eh?" said the driver.

"Nope!"

"Well brother, you must have got tanked to get away out here in that outfit!" the man in the car insisted.

"Haven't taken a drink of anything stronger than buttermilk since I got my honorable, and I do mean *honorable* discharge papers from the greatest navy in the world, about eleven months ago! I'm sober and perfectly harmless!" Hi declared with emphasis.

"Oh! Now I think I know what happened! I've listened to that fellow Edward's pranks on the radio; but I never expected to run across one of his gang this far from New York City—especially at this time of the day! Come on get in; I suppose you'll earn a big cash reward for this stunt! You don't look as if you carried a Tommy gun under that blanket—now, where did you want to go, and what *did* happen?"

Hi pulled the blanket close up to his neck and folded it across in front of him, completely covering his arms and legs, as he sat down beside the driver who sensed something of a mystery—or at least an interesting story. Being of a hospitable nature and desiring to put his guest at ease, he offered Hi a cigarette, took one for himself and lighted both of them.

Hi took a few puffs, sighed contentedly and breathed a silent prayer of thanks for deliverance from the awful plight he had discovered himself in when he awoke. As the car started west, he said:

"Whew! That sun was getting warm; and my tongue feels as dry as a wad of cotton!"

The driver steered with one hand while he reached through the opening in the cab at the back of the seat and dragged a half-filled water bag inside and handed it to his passenger. Hi eagerly removed the cork and held the moist bag up in front of his face while the cool water trickled down his parched throat; then he replaced the bag back of the driver, took another puff and explained, in detail, how he had met Zenobia, had started in pursuit of her, had become tired and intended to sleep only two hours, but had actually slept eight hours and had awakened a few minutes ago and found everything gone.

When he had finished, the driver of the pick-up, voiced no doubt on his part as to the plausibility of Hi's explanation; but after a few moments of silence, he turned to Hi and said:

"I believe your story all right; but let me caution you,

any member of the law might think otherwise—until they had held you and made inquiries and investigations—which might require some time. By that time the young lady would be comfortably located in California, or else she would be so deep in complications that you couldn't be of much help, even if you did succeed in locating her!"

"Yes, I've thought of all that; and a lot of other terrible things! Oh Mister! I simply *can't* afford to lose any time—every second is precious! I'll gladly let them, him, her or whatever it was that made away with my belongings, have the cash, my clothes—yes, they can have Sylvia too! All I want right now is to get to California! I suppose most any merchant would outfit me in some kind of work clothes in exchange for my watch!"

The driver was a bit amused and suspicious at the manner in which Hi referred to the ancient and scrapped up car, as Sylvia; but he couldn't help feeling sorry for him. After a few moments of mental debate with himself, he face brightened and he turned to Hi and made an interesting promise:

"I'll do whatever I can to help out. I'm on my way to visit my sister who lives a short distance west of Albuquerque; so I'll take you that far; and when we get there, I'll see if she has any of her late husband's clothes laying around—he was a bit heavier than you, but his clothes would look better than that blanket—and I'm sure you will think they feel better. Perhaps you can sell, or borrow some money on your watch, then catch a bus the rest of the way."

"Ah thanks fellow! You've certainly proven that old adage: **"A FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND IN DEED."** I appreciate your kindness and I'll gladly pay you for this ride and for any other assistance you give me, just as soon as I get settled in California—or till they catch the culprits who robbed me!"

They paused at a wayside cafe, and the driver went in and bought two toasted ham and egg sandwiches, a whole coffee cake and two pint milk bottles full of steaming hot coffee. He explained to the waitress that his partner was quite lame and could not come inside to eat. Then they drove on a mile or so further before they stopped and ate a late breakfast.

As they drove along the smooth, winding highway, they debated what method might prove most satisfactory in reporting the loss of the car, money and clothes. Hi kept a close watchout for any signs of Sylvia—even hoping that she would take one of her temperamental spells and who-

ever stole her would abandon her—yet, he had no evidence, or reason to believe that the stolen car was headed in the same direction that he was!

Chapter Eight

DESERTED!

AFTER PUTTING the trailer in order, Zenobia sat down to watch the scenery as the big trailer sped along Highway 66. As she so aptly expressed it: the big coach was bulging with supplies, she was on her way to California and the first leg of the journey had not cost her a penny! The only cloud which drifted over her blue skies of hope, was the thought that she had left Hi so suddenly; she thought of so many things that she would liked to have, or should have said to him. She promised herself that during her stay in Amarillo, she would send a post card at least—perhaps write a long letter. She would write to him from California, so he would not worry about her or take a notion to follow her.

It was almost one o'clock when she signaled to the driver of the tow car and while they stopped she served a generous lunch of sandwiches, pie and coffee to the driver and his helper. As they resumed their journey, she hummed and sang the song that she had sung at the hospital and the lilting tunes and words were significant of her happiness at being on her way to the place which held so much promise for her. The afternoon passed quickly. By four-thirty, they arrived at the place on the outskirts of Amarillo where the tow car was to leave her.

Her benefactor parked her trailer near the combination filling station and grocery store and instructed the owner to be on the alert for anyone who might take the plucky girl and her home on wheels further on her journey west. Drawing the attendant aside, he explained briefly how Zenobia had lost her father after he had lost every cent he had and left his daughter stranded with a heavily mortgaged lunch-room. Again refusing to accept any fees for his services, the driver of the tow car, hooked onto a small, unloaded truck and, telling her that he was to stop at a friend's cabin court for a few hours rest before returning to Clinton, he wished her luck and left.

From the window at the rear end of the trailer, Zenobia

could see all the cars and trucks that stopped at the service station and grocery store. From the manner in which the manager greeted each customer, she could usually tell whether they were local customers or tourists who might be going some distance; and she was pleased to note that the man asked the driver of almost every car headed west, if there was any chance of getting them to pull the trailer.

One man, the driver of a small car which was loaded with a large family of children, their luggage and a goodsized dog, would gladly have pulled the trailer had not his small, four cylinder car been so old and so heavily loaded. When a huge, low swung, high powered convertible stopped for gas, the attendant noticed that it was equipped with a trailer hitch and he hastened to ask the driver, a happy faced young man, if he would care to pull the trailer as far as he might be going.

"Gee Mister!" the youth said, looking down at the blue-eyed blonde girl who snuggled against his shoulder, "I'm—I mean—well, we're on our honeymoon and we're going to California—but—what about it Babe, should we or should we not?"

The blonde bride who had begun to assume a pouting look, shook her head in a firm negative reply, so the groom added: "Sorry Sir. But I—I mean we can't accommodate the lady! So long!"

Another driver, whom the gas station man knew slightly, stopped and looking inquiringly at the huge, expensive house trailer asked:

"Friends of yours?"

"Yes, very good friends," the attendant replied.

"Are they stopping here or going farther west?" the tall, sleek looking fellow with a perpetual cigarette dangling from his thick lips asked, as he noticed Zenobia enter the coach.

"They're going to California eventually," the gas man answered, as he wiped a bespattered windshield for the inquiring driver of the big sedan which had stopped numerous times while on his way to and from San Diego, California, where he hauled passengers to various parts of the middle west and the east. The class of men and women who usually made up the parties, and the fact that the drivers invariably have a bottle of liquor handy, caused the attendant to discard this man as one who would not be desirable, or to be trusted to safely transport the trailer and its attractive owner to the west coast. Beside the driver, there were two other men with bloodshot eyes and liquor laden breaths in the car.

He evaded other questions the curious driver attempted to ask, concerning the trailer, and, at the insistence of his passengers, the big car departed.

Zenobia wasn't exactly uneasy when at eight thirty, she was still sitting beside the gas station near Amarillo. After all, she assured herself, she could not expect just anyone driving any type of car who might happen to be going west, to undertake the more or less difficult task of pulling such a large trailer—not if it was much easier to pull than it appeared to be. She assured herself that it might require a day or two, or possibly a week, to find the right driver; and that did not worry her, as she had most comfortable living quarters and plenty of food and there was a grocery store handy.

She prepared a good supper of steak and potatoes for herself; and after the dishes were washed, she wrote a letter to Hi. She told him what a thrilling experience his idea of hitch-hiking with a house trailer had proven to be and promised to write again at her next stop, telling him of all the adventures she encountered along the way. After the letter was dutifully posted in the mailbox on the post near the store entrance, she listened to several radio programs which she had enjoyed before the duties of the lunchroom interrupted them. Just as the nine o'clock news broadcast was ended, the attendant rapped on the trailer door and told Zenobia that she might as well go to bed if she cared to; that he would be on duty till eleven, then he would close up for the balance of the night. In the meantime, he would continue to search for a westbound driver who might help her on her way.

She shut off the radio, picked up a magazine and propped herself up with a stack of soft pillows and tried to read; but could not get interested in the accounts of other people's adventures or love affairs. She had begun to brush her long, dark tresses, a ritual she performed each night before retiring, when the attendant rapped at her door and informed her that there was a couple who were on their way to California, who would pull her trailer for a nominal fee. He confidently assured Zenobia that if she did not care to, or could not afford to pay the sum they asked, that he would dismiss them and try to find someone else. He assured her that they had a very good car, an eight cylinder coupe and that they appeared to be an average American man and wife of middle age. The man had suggested, but did not demand,

that it was worth one hundred and fifty dollars to pull the trailer to San Bernardino, California.

The girl was a bit surprised; but recalled that she had come this far free, so she gladly accepted their offer. The verbal agreement was that they were to drive day and night, the husband and wife taking turns at the wheel, until they reached the end of their journey. They were to stop only for food and to service the car.

After the station owner cashed a travelers' check for her, Zenobia paid the couple one hundred and fifty dollars in cash, watched them hook the trailer to the car, thanked the service station man who had been so courteous and accommodating, entered the big room with the rich furnishings and started on her way.

The driver of the big blue coupe soon hit a lively pace—which if continued, would get them to the city in the beautiful mountain range within thirty hours at least. She was confident and content; and planned to prepare three wholesome meals a day, with in-between snacks for her benefactors during the drive west.

She was not quite sure how far San Bernardino was from the film capitol, Hollywood; but she reasoned that it couldn't be too far. Once that near, she would have little or no trouble in reaching her goal. She finished brushing her hair, donned her night clothes and retired. The swaying motion of the trailer, combined with the freedom from mental strain, lulled her into a deep, restful sleep.

It was with difficulty that she finally forced her eyes open. The sun was shining through the spaces in the Venetian blinds, making horizontal stripes of yellow on the deep green folds of the partition curtains. She lay still for a few moments, trying to collect her thoughts and to recall the circumstances. At first, she thought she was still parked beside the lunchroom, and had overslept, then she remembered that she was on her way to California; but the trailer was motionless and there was not a sound to be heard! Supposing that the driver had stopped for gas, she raised up on her elbow and looked out. There was nothing, except a stretch of barren desert-like ground on that side. She stepped out of bed and went over and turned the shade at the window on the other side of the trailer. There she saw a small gas station; but it appeared to be closed. Dashing to the front window, she looked out; but there was no blue Coupe, or any other car in sight! Instantly, the sickening thought that she

had been deserted struck her like a sharp blow across the face.

"Now isn't this a pretty kettle of fish, a fine how-do-you-do and a revolting situation all combined!" she moaned, as she slipped her nightgown over her head, tossed it at the bed and slipped into a brown and gold skirt and sweater set. "Side-tracked here in this lonely place—and all that money gone with the wind too! Why, at this rate, I won't have enough money to pay my way to Arizona! Wish I knew where I am—oh good Heavens! Those dirty bush-whackers might have gone north, south or east instead of west! For all I know, I might be back in Oklahoma! Oh, *perish the thought!*"

She actually had no idea what to do next; but she finished dressing, from force of habit if for no other reason. When she was pinning her braided hair in place across the crown of her head, a huge oiltank truck with a giant trailer, drew in before the closed gas station. This one had hardly stopped and the motor was shut off before a second, and yet a third truck of the same type, drew alongside the first one. The trailer of the last one was left almost crosswise of the highway because there was no room for it in the station area.

Zenobia had decided to go out and ask one of the truck drivers where she was, when a small, hopped-up car roared up, slid in behind the trucks and a sleepy-eyed young man climbed out, greeted the drivers in a familiar manner, then unlocked the station door and gas pumps. Quickly sizing up the situation, he noticed that the last truck had no parking space; and, bristling with authority, he stalked over and banged on the door of the house trailer as he demanded:

"Hey! You nincompoops inside! Come on an' git this wreck out of the way!"

Zenobia snatched the door open and snapped:

"I'll have you know that I'm not a nincompoop. This is NOT a wreck and what's more, I did not ask to be parked here!"

"All right lady! ye DON'T look like no nincompoop—unless they're different than what I supposed they was—but why—where's yer ol' man? Now don't tell me ye had a family row an' he took off with th' car an' left ye here alone in this big palace on wheels!"

"No!" she flashed, "he did not! That is,—I haven't a husband, so, I couldn't have had a family row—but, well, maybe that was what happened to the couple who was supposed to tow me to California! That old sister looked like the

jealous type!"

The youth was becoming quite interested and a bit sympathetic. He hadn't much more to say to the girl, except:

"Gosh! I'm sorry t' hear about yer hard luck—that wuz a lowdown mean trick t' play on anybody; an' only th' worst sort o' a scoundrel would leave a girl like you a settin' out here alone. But ye see Miss, yer house trailer is settin' right smack-dab in th' way o' th' trucks gettin' t' m' pumps—an' these fellers is m' best customers. What's more, there'll be 'nother passle o' em along in a few minnits an' there's no room fer 'em!"

"I'm sorry; and I wish that I could get out of your way. I realize how annoying and inconvenient it is for you to have my trailer blocking the way to your pumps! Tell me one thing please—where am I?"

"Where are ye!" the young gas station man repeated, "Why lady! don't ye know that ye're on th' belt route o' 66? That's Albuquerque over there!"

"Albuquerque!" she exclaimed, "Well, I've made it this far—there just *has* to be some way in getting the rest of the way!"

Two cars of tourists, headed east, stopped as near the gas pumps as they could get. At sight of so many customers and the thought of losing one or more, caused the attendant to again become impatient.

"Now see here Miss! You just gotta move on an' give m' customers room. This ain't a parkin' lot ye know!"

"All right Mister, just show or tell me *how* and *where* I can move and I'll be glad to oblige!" she replied defiantly.

The attendant threw his hands out in helpless dismay, scratched his befuddled forehead and went to his pumps and began filling the tank on the first truck. The driver of that truck pulled ahead of the house trailer and parked beside the road to make room for his buddies to fill their tanks.

While the second truck was at the pump, the confusion at the little filling station was further enhanced by the appearance of a large vehicle with black smoke escaping from the exhaust and the sound, that only the running of a large or heavily loaded car with a flat tire can make.

The clang-blump! clang-bump! sounded above every other sound of the early morning on the highway, where big trucks with heavy loads would be expected to make many noises. Everyone, including Zenobia, who had stepped outside the coach, looked in mingled awe, amusement and utter disbelief at the approaching vehicle. The various truck

drivers and their helpers looked at each other to see if they were seeing the same thing. The exasperated attendant pulled nervously at the lobe of his left ear and groaned:

"Oh no! *that* would have to stop here! Of all the outlandish sights I've seen on this road an' lot o' others, this one takes the prize!"

As everyone either scurried to safety, made room for the approaching apparatus on wheels, or simply gazed, wide-eyed, the smoking vehicle, an old Cadillac hearse of the early '20 vintage, nosed their way. The long black body, rounded hood, with big, bulging headlights, like glowing eyes at each side, and the new type wheels with which it had been equipped, resembled a hippopotamus walking knee deep in mud. The dusty black body squeezed in between the two remaining trucks and came to an asthmatic stop.

In the cab of the vehicle, sat a man whose large size was further emphasized by the roomy bib overalls, faded blue chambray shirt and wide brimmed gray felt hat he wore. His big hands and long arms almost covered the steering wheel. Beside him sat a buxom, rosy-cheeked woman with mouse-colored hair which was cut in a square, "milk-crock", fashion bob; she wore a red and white checked gingham dress with numerous safety pins of various sizes dangling from the left side of the broad bosom. Each of her arms was circled about a small child, evidently twins; and between the husky man and woman was wedged another child of about two years, while another youngster, perhaps a year older, lay on the ledge at the top of the black leather-covered seat back.

Two old battered and dust covered brown imitation leather suitcases, with their bulging lids held in place by rounds of small white rope, were anchored to each front fender by means of a piece of heavier rope which reached like a saddlegirth, across the black hood. More suitcases, boxes, valises, a stuffed gunny sack and two boxes, the size of apple boxes, were roped, wired and strapped to the runningboards, the rear fenders and to the top.

At about the exact time the man and woman lumbered from their respective sides of the cab, the rear door of the hearse was flung open and out clambered seven more husky youngsters, ranging in age from five to fourteen years. Each had either red or reddish blonde hair and several were dressed in duplicate colors like the smallest ones the woman held in her arms, indicating that there were other sets of twins.

When the surprised reception committee had counted the

seventh pair of legs to appear through the two small doors, which had been made to receive caskets, they decided that must be the last. However just then a pair of thin, denim-clad shanks appeared, tottered a moment, then braced themselves and waited attentively as another pair of scrawny ankles, clad in much darned black cotton stockings above a pair of hightopped black shoes with square, flat heels and topped by the lower edge of a blue print, cotton skirt appeared. The aged man assisted a frail looking little old woman to the ground. She straightened her bonnet, adjusted her blue apron; then the entire list of passengers converged on the two small rest rooms!

While the drivers, the attendant and Zenobia stepped closer in order to inspect the old conveyance, there was a series of shouts of glee, giggles and shushs. From the men's side of the building came the stern warning: "Now you young'uns b'have or I'll whoop ye right here an' now!"

While from the other side, the mother was saying: "All right chil'ren go ahead an' wash yer faces an' han's with that good-smellin soap—but don'cha dare waste nary a drop of it! Gracious me! ye'll all have yer faces an' han's washed plum' away a'fore we git t' Callie-fornie effn they's some o' this hear soap what smells like roses in ever' gas place!"

The driver of the hearse, his five sons and his aged father filled the men's section of the washroom to capacity. He washed his face and hands, dampened his shock of sandy colored hair and combed it carefully with an old brass-trimmed comb which he had picked up from the ledge back of him as he left the cab. When he had finished, he handed the comb to his father and instructed him to hand it to the eldest son who was to pass it on after each had finished with it, then he emerged to meet the group outside.

Despite an all night drive, he appeared pert and jovial. His six foot four inch, two hundred and forty pound frame was supple and did not appear to be the least bit tired. Striding over to the crowd, he promptly introduced himself:

"Howdy folks! I'm Learned Meeks an' me an' m' family are from Piney, Arkansas an' we're on our way t' Cookmun-gie, Callie-fornie! What'd ye think o' m' car—ain't she a pip!"

"Oh yes! It's something—yes sir!"

"Quite an idea!"

"Never saw anything like it!"

"I'll be darned!"

"It really is—*unusual!*" were some of responses—the last coming from Zenobia.

"Yeah!" Meeks replied, with an air of great pride and complete satisfaction. "Ever since I wuz a boy back thar on th' farm I've wanted t' own a Cad-lak auty-mobile! Th' fust one I ever seed, wuz when a trav'lin' man drove b' m' place—he'd got plum' off'n th' main road an' wuz lost an'—well sir! th' way that m'chine snorted an' pulled! — an' ye should'a heered 'bout th' things that feller said it could do!"

Some of the listeners laughed heartily—Zenobia gasped: "Oh!" and the big man continued:

"Yes Sir! I sez t' m'self, Learned, hit might be a long wait but th' fust auty-mobile ye own is goin' t' be a Cad-lak! I won't settle fer nothin' else! So-o, when m' cousin, what'd been out thar in Cook-mungie, Callie-fornie fer nigh ont' twelve year, kept a writin' an' beggin' me t' fetch th' wife an' kids an' come out whar I'd have a good job on a ranch, an' th' kids'd have a better chanct t' git proper book larnin'; an' th' undertaker feller in Piney—that's th' feller what bury's th' dead an' gits paid fer it, d'cided t' buy hisself a new hearse, so's he could put on a more stylish buryin' fer th' folks 'round them parts. Well sir, hit jes happ'nd that I knowed him purty well, so I sez t' him: 'Will, how much'll ye take fer that ol' Cad-lak gas wag'n what ye ain't goin' t' use no more?'"

"Well, he eyes me sort o' sus-pishus like fer a minnet an' sez: 'Why Learned! ye ain't allowin' t' go int' bizzness an' cum-pete with me air ye?' An', not wantin' t' cause m' fren Will no undue worry, I sez: No Will a'corse not! Fact is, I've fin'ly d'cided t' go t' Cook-mungie, Callie-fornie; an' knowin' that it'd cost a mite too much fe rall o' us t' go by train, an' not bein' fi-nanshully able t' buy one o' them new Cad-lak cars—an' havin' m' mind sot on a Cad-lak er nothin', I been thinkin' thet that hearse ye don't need, would be th' very thing t' haul m'self an' m' big fam'ly out thar to Cook-mungie in!"

"So you bought the hearse" Zenobia asked.

"Yep!" continued Meeks, "got it at a real bargain too! M' fren' Will knowed as how th' crops I'd been tryin' t' raise had been burnt up with th' dr'th, th' supply o' water fer th' stock as well as fer ourselves petered out, Aggie, m' wife lost most o' her chickens with th' limberneck—what warn't catch'd b' th' pesky hawks an' weasles—then th' only cow we had left, broke int' th' garden one night an' jes about cleaned out ever'thin' 'cept a few green onions; so Will,

knowin' thet he couldn't take none o' his money with him when a' undertaker feller frum some other town had t' come an' haul him away, let me have th' ol' hearse for a token pa'mint o' jes ten dollars—no mor'age, no strings 'tached!"

"Undertakers are usually very understanding and generous," Zenobia asserted; and Meeks continued

"Yep, they have an op'tunity most ever' day t' know thet death is *one* thing thet ye can d'pen' on! Bein' th' good fr'en that he is, he wanted t' see me an' m' fam'ly get a new an' better start in life, so he prac'ily give th' ol' Cad-lak hearse t' me; an' so we packed our duds, sitch as they are—Aggie, thet's m' wife, baked a mess o' bis'kits, fried th' last o' our young chickens and made a big batch o' fried apple pies an' packed 'em in thet thar grub box on th' fender, an' we wuz ready t' start. I'd had th' blacksmith at Piney, 'nother good fr'en' o' mine, put one o' them trailer couplins on th' Cad-lak, and I wuz a aimin' t' bring a two wheel trailer what th' blacksmith had made out'n two wheels from an ol' wrecked car an' a few boards, bolts an' some canvas for a cover, what he said was jes what I needed t' haul our beddin' an' things in—Aggie an' Ma t'gether has nine feather beds an' at least twenty good goose down pillers an' doz'ns o' quilts an' comf'erts—some o' th' prettiest patterns ye ever seed to! We allowed we'd take what canned an' dried fruit, mos'ly peaches an' apples—an' a bag o' dried elderblossoms an' some sas-safras roots that we use for tea, an' our three trunks, when along comes a feller what'd jes come frum Callie-fornie, an' sez: 'Learned *don't* do it! Don't take all them purty uilts an' them goose-hair pillers and beds. Them fellers at th' Callie-fornie an' Arizonie state line will tear things t' pieces—rip comferts an' quilts t' shreds a lookin' for fruit an' veg'table bugs! An' th' all-fired import'nt manners'd scare th' wits out'n ye t' boot!' So we sol' the trailer an' shipped th' whole kit an' kaboodle, 'cept two o' th' feather beds an a few blankets an' pillers what we needed t' make shake-downs when we have t' stop t' sleep an' fer th' kids an' Pa an' Ma t' set on—take a look inside th' ol' hack! See, ain't she cozy? Winders, so's they can see ever'thin' as we go along—an' by layin' crosswise, they can all sleep while me an' Aggie an' th' four littlest young'uns set up front!"

Beaming with pride in ownership, Mr. Meeks displayed the interior of the ancient hearse. There was surprising neatness despite the number of persons who rode there. The two featherbeds were rolled inside blankets and lay along each side and more neatly folded blankets lay on these. An

old faded, and fly-specked motto: "GOD BLESS OUR HOME", was pinned to the faded mohair lining at the far end, and a small violin rested in a hammock-like affair which consisted of a yard of white mosquito netting. It was gathered at the ends and fastened to each opposite side, up close to the upholstered ceiling. The long plate glass windows at each side and the two small ones in the rear doors, were clean—except for a few finger prints.

While they were admiring the ingenious equipment of the hearse, Sara, the seven year old Meeks daughter, ran from the women's rest room and sidled up beside her father and whispered in a voice so loud that all could hear:

"Mommie said she wanted th' comb so's we can do our hair!" Mr. Meeks began searching through his pockets; then remembering that he had left it with the boys in the men's wash room, he turned in the direction of the small window and called:

"Hey Seth! Pa! Are you through with th' comb? Th' wimmin folks want it so's they can primp a bit if'n ye air!"

A sandy haired lad of nine, who looked like his father, except for size, ran out and handed the comb to his sister—who scampered towards the other end of the little white building that housed the two public restrooms.

While Zenobia and the others listened to Leonard Meeks praise his beloved motor vehicle and throw in a few stories about what some of his friends in Piney had said about it, the Meeks family began assembling around the hearse. Utopia Meeks, mother of Learned, had removed the plaid scarf she had worn over her head displaying her thin gray hair, moist with water and parted in the middle and stretched back over each ear, ending in a small knot, held in place by two long shell hairpins, and a comb; with a fringe of short, unruly hair hanging down over her wrinkled neck. Silver-rimmed spectacles covered her dim blue eyes and she fingered the pockets and hem of her big blue apron as she stood slightly apart from the crowd. Aggie and her daughters appeared with clean faces and carefully combed hair.

Nate Meeks, whom the children called "Gramp" and Learned referred to as Pa, had combed the thin ring of red-tinged white which formed a ring along the sides and back of his head, and his whiskers which grew in abundance from his lower jaw. Adam and Asa, the middle-sized twins were hungry; Ruthie and Lillie, the two eldest girls were in search of landscape prints and picture postcards; Johnny, the six year old, had climbed to the top of the hearse and,

flapping his arms against his sides, and stretching his neck forward, he did a clever imitation of a rooster crowing. Then Essie, a five year old, joined her brother and did a few steps of a square dance atop the weatherbeaten cab. This act brought a roar of applause from those on the ground; and Aggie and Learned and the aged grandparents beamed with pride. Aggie asked her little daughter, Essie, to recite the piece she had spoken at the church on children's day, for the folks. The little girl hesitated for a moment, as she bashfully clasped her hands behind her and traced a pattern on the roof of the cab with the toe of her shoe. At a stern command from her father to: "Lis'en t' what yer ma's tellin' ye" she faced her audience, brushed a wisp of hair from over her eyes, smoothed her little plaid gingham skirt and perking her head to one side, she said:

"Ribbons upon m' shoulders—slippers upon m' feet,
I'm m' mamma's little darling—don't ye think I'm
awful sweet?"

Learned joined the others in applauding; then he reached up and took the blushing and giggling Essie in his arms and giving her a big hug, placed her on the ground—just as his mother, who had shaded her bespectacled eyes with her hand and had been looking at the flat tire on the left hind wheel, turned to Learned and said impatiently:

"Well fer lan' sakes Son! Ye hain't fixed that flat wheel yet! Now ye don't 'spect us t' ride on thet bumpety-bump contraption all th' rest o' th' way t' Callie-fornie do ye?"

This was a cruel reminder to Learned of the plight he was in. He said to his mother: "'Course not Ma—I'll 'tend to it right now!" and, lifting the big gray hat and scratching his head thoughtfully, he turned to the attendant and inquired: "Mister, do ye happ'n t' have a tire an' tube what'd fit this wheel?"

"I'm not sure that I have. Not many tires on the market out here and the demand has been heavy lately! Now let's see—yes, it has been equipped with the new type wheels. Just a minute while I see what I have in the stock room!"

While the station operator was looking for a tire, the oil trucks and their trailers began to maneuver out of the wedged-in space and drove away. Other trucks and cars came by; a couple of them stopped—but all stared wonderingly at the old hearse.

"Sorry Mr. Meeks; but I don't have a thing, not even a secondhand tire that I could patch up for you!" the attendant announced.

Learned looked at his wife, then at Zenobia, then back to the attendant, and asked:

"How fer is it t' 'nother gas station?"

"Well, if you go back to where you left the main route of 66 and go on into town, it will be about—er—about four miles. Now, would you mind pulling up a few yards, so these cars can get in? Just drive in there between the house trailer and the restrooms, while you're decidin' what to do!"

Zenobia watched the hearse slide in close to her stranded home on wheels; and she felt a sincere understanding of the Meeks family's plight. She seriously doubted whether they had the money with which to purchase many tires—perhaps not even one; which was so essential to their progress. Simple as their tastes might be, it would require a lot of food to satisfy fifteen mouths while enroute to California—and she was sure that they were equally as anxious to reach the Golden State as she was. Looking at their happy faces and observing their behavior, she knew that they were honest beyond doubt; and disregarding her own predicament for the moment at least, she longed to assist this family. To her they not only symbolized the prolific size of the rural families, but also the honest, traditionally thrifty and resourcefulness of the folk from the rugged hill country, where the productive roots of American ancestry is deeply and firmly planted.

"How I wish that I had a spare tire for them! I do have one for the trailer; but it wouldn't fit that big car wheel! Oh Oh!" Zenobia exclaimed to no one in particular, "Daddy used to carry a spare tire in the compartment back there at the rear of the trailer where the awning and some folding chairs, tables and things are carried! I don't remember having seen him remove the tire when the man took his car; so I wonder, if by any lucky chance there might be a tire there now. If there is, would it fit that wheel?"

She ran inside the coach and took a bunch of keys from the drawer in the little desk and, as she ran, with key in hand to the compartment which was accessible only from the outside, an idea, an unusual and desperate idea entered her head. She unlocked the long, narrow door which opened from the top like an oven door, and peered into the space which was no more than fourteen inches high but which extended six feet back under the floor of the trailer, to the

edge of the flat, copper water tank which carried sufficient water for cooking and showers for a couple of days at least. Pushing aside the folds of the big awning, which was made in sections, with roof and walls placed in handy stacks, she almost disappeared inside the compartment, then backed out dragging a new, fully inflated tire after her.

With a squeal of delight, she turned around and sat down on the extended door and said: "Mr. Meeks, if I could furnish a new tire, would you pull my trailer to some place along the main route where I wouldn't be in the way while I wait and try to find someone to take me on to California?"

"Gosh yes Miss! Why I'd pull thet fancy a'fair clean t' Callie-fornia if'n ye'd like me to!"

"Would you? Oh that sounds almost too good to be true! Now if *only* this tire will fit—let me take another look!" she said and again crawled practically inside the storage space, then exclaimed jubilantly: "Why there is another tire in here!" Oh tires, you *must* fit the man's car!" she said, as she rolled one tire to the ground and pulled the second one forward to see for sure whether it was the same size as the first one. Meeks picked up the big tire in his two big, strong, deeply calloused hands, and smiling fondly at it, he said:

"Jes' made t' order! Well, Miss, what'll ye take fer it?"

"I'm making you a present of this tire; and if you really meant what you said about towing my trailer to California," she replied; a new idea popping into her head, "I'd be glad to give both tires to you—and pay for your services besides!"

"Well thank ye Miss! Now thet's right neighborly o' ye! But shucks Miss, whar I come frum, folks don't charge fer ever' little neighborly act they do—like pullin' t' Callie-fornie, when we're both a heading fer thar anyhow! Who knows, we might b'come close neighbors out thar; an' I'd be plum' glad t' pull yer trailer—'specially since ye're alone. Ye air alone ain't ye?"

"Yes that's right Mr. Meeks, I am alone; and I appreciate your kind offer more than I can tell you. I do want to get to California. I'll explain the circumstances while you change the tire, then if you still want to take me, I'd be very grateful; but if you should decide that you can't or do not care to, you may take me as far as the main highway. Then you may have the tire for your trouble and you may go on; if you decide to take me, why let's get started—for the sooner we do get started, the better it will suit me!"

Zenobia discovered a jack and several other tire-changing tools in the compartment; and while Meeks and his eldest son began removing the badly chewed tire, Gramp offered advice, and Granny, Aggie and three of the older children stood by while she explained why she had decided to go to California in the first place; and how she happened to be left stranded near the closed service station—and finally, of her desire to go on in spite of the numerous set-backs she had encountered so far.

"Now child, don't ye worry one bit!" Granny Meeks said, as she gave Zenobia's shoulder a friendly pat with her long, bony, sun-tanned hand, "We aim t' look out fer ye all th' rest o' th' way! M' son Learned's as good a driver o' a team o' mules as ever yelled 'gee! er haw!' an' I feel sartin he can drive this m'sheen as well as he can drive mules! Anyhow, dearie, we'll git ye t' th' Glor'us Golden West—an' onc't thar, I know I rec'on rightly, thet ye'll make good! Lillie, m' gran'datter here, wants t' go t' school an' learn t' teach school; don't ye Lillie?"

"Yes ma'am! An' I'm goin' to too!" replied the blue-eyed girl of eleven.

One of the younger children began to wail: "Ma! I'm hungry!" and several of the others took up the chorus.

Aggie tried to "shush" them and Learned promised to stop at the first grocery store they came to and buy some cheese, crackers and baloney, then drive on and stop beside the road, build a fire to make coffee for the older folks and a pot of elderblossom tea for the kids. The children became quiet; and Aggie explained to Zenobia:

"Th' grub we cooked up afore we left home two days ago, is about all gone—I put th' las' four bis'kits in a paper poke an' kept 'em for th' Danny an' Nanny, th' littlest twins, t' snack on whil'st we drove las' night! My! it's a sight how much vittles it takes t' satisfy fifteen hungry mouths—specially when we're travelin' along an' see s' many signs t' remind us o' food!"

Zenobia knew that there was an abundance of food in her trailer; and she decided that this family was quite worthy and welcome to share it. She silently blessed Lupe and Tony for having done such an excellent job of stocking the trailer with food—the food that she would have had to leave behind, had they not carried it into the trailer while she was attending to last minute duties just before leaving. She stepped inside to see if there was a possibility of seating all of her guests inside. She recalled having read stories of

the generous hospitality of the people who lived in the hills, like those where the Meeks family had been reared; and, according to every one of these stories, no one, whether neighbor or stranger, rich or poor, were ever made unwelcome. The best food available was placed before a guest—even if it often meant less and poorer food for the family. The best bed was provided for him who tarried in the humble home—if members of the family had to sleep on pallets on the floor. Zenobia reacted with equal hospitality, by stepping to the door and announcing:

"Folks! my house trailer is well stocked with food. As soon as the tire is replaced, so we can move to some place where we will be out of the way of this filling station, I want you to be my guests at breakfast!"

A hearty "Thank ye Miss!" from Learned, an expressive, "Much a'bliged!" from Aggie, "God bless ye m' chile!" from Granny, "I'm right grateful t'ye young lady!" from Gramp and "Oh! goody, goody!" "Hot-ziggity!" "Whoops! th' lady as't us t' eat!" accompanied by noisy handclapping and giggles from the children followed her welcome invitation.

The young station operator, who had began to assist Meeks in replacing the tire, straightened up and, smiling sheepishly at the pretty girl standing in the doorway, said: "I'm sorry Miss—about the nasty things I said to you—about bein' a nincompoop an' everything! I was sleepy and mean tempered. The big trucks have been taken care of now and—well, there's room here for any more customers who might stop. So you an' these good people just stay right where you are for as long as you want to—you're not in anybody's way!"

"Thank you Sir! I really don't blame you for anything you said—or thought!" Zenobia replied; and added sweetly, "Won't you join us for breakfast? There'll be toast, bacon and eggs and plenty of coffee!"

"Aw gee whiz Miss! Thanks a lot! You're very kind to invite me. I did have to jump out of bed and into my clothes and dash out of the house without waiting for Mom to fix breakfast! We both overslept, and I knew the big trucks would be along—they come by twice a week, and I didn't want to miss them!" he replied, wiping his hands on a wad of lint. Then approaching the door to the trailer he had curiosity written all over his, now wide awake, face.

Zenobia asked him to step inside, where she showed him the stacks of food which filled every conceivable space. The

youth stared in wonderment at the richly furnished interior of the long couch.

"Ah yes! This is the nicest thing on wheels that I ever saw!" he commented. "Thanks Miss, I'd like very much to eat breakfast with you—that is, if a customer don't stop and I get too busy!"

As the attendant stepped outside, Aggie Meeks, with one of the "littlest" twins in each arm, approached the door timidly and peered inside.

"Come on in Mrs. Meeks and make yourself right at home! You and your husband, children and their grandparents! I'll find a place for you to sit while you eat! Now let me see—you and Mr. Meeks and the four little ones may sit here at this table—the elder Mr. and Mrs. Meeks here at this desk. Here are some folding chairs. The other children and you, Mr. Station Man, sit on the long divans at either end. I have some small folding tables that I can set up before you."

While water was heating for the coffee, Zenobia got cushions and thick books for the four youngest children to sit on so they would be high enough to reach their plates. Then she placed little tables before the richly upholstered seats which reached from side to side at either end of the big room.

When Aggie had seated her four youngest offspring, had given each of them a cracker to nibble on while breakfast was being prepared, she asked: "If'n they's anythin' I kin do, jes let me know—want me t' turn th' bacon?"

"Yes, if you don't mind—I'll stir the wheat mush to prevent it from becoming lumpy—I detest lumpy mush; and I suppose everyone else does," Zenobia replied.

Mr. Meeks and Seth, the eldest son, discarded the old tire, replaced the tools in the compartment and hurriedly washed up as the smell of frying bacon and brewing coffee drifted from the trailer.

Gramp and Granny, seated before the little desk on which Zenobia had spread a pretty, lace trimmed doily, were as happy as teen-agers at a taffy-pull at "bein' as't t' eat out!" The station operator had slipped out of his soiled coveralls and was wearing a suit of clean tan twill when he stepped inside the door and sank back into the soft cushions.

Zenobia pulled the biscuit board out part way to provide a place where she would be near the stove and the extra food while she ate. She delegated Lillie and Ruthie to help serve. Dishes of canned peaches were placed beside the hot

porrage—with plenty of cream from the refrigerator for both. The main course of bacon, eggs and toast with plenty of real butter available, was served next. Jars of jam, marmalade and strained honey were on hand to finish the meal. There was plenty of coffee for the grown-ups and sweet milk for the children. The children, bred with respect for their elders and trained in good behavior, were remarkably quiet throughout the meal. They often exchanged questioning glances; for this was a grand experience for them. They would discuss the event among themselves later, when they were on their way; but just now, they knew that they must be seen but not heard.

After he had finished his fourth slice of buttered toast, which was piled with strawberry jam, and had drank three cups of coffee, Learned Meeks carefully wiped his mouth and his wide hands with the paper napkin; and getting up from the stool beside the breakfast table that was built in between the two clothes closets, he said: "Don't think I ever et better vit'ls in m' whole life!" Then, wiping his forehead with a huge red bandana, he continued: "Well now Miss, we'd better be ske-daddlin'! Time's a'wastin' and' we're all jes' itchin' t' get t' Callie-fornie!"

"Very well Mr. Meeks! I'm ready when you are! Here's ten dollars—get all the gas and oil your car will hold before we start! I'm sure that I can wash the dishes as we go along. And, now that there is plenty of room, I'd like to have your father and mother and at least some of the children, ride in the trailer with me; then the back of your car will not be so crowded or so heavily loaded. They can change about so they won't become so tired."

Nate and his wife Utopia, were delighted at being asked to ride inside the big trailer—its comforts and luxuries far surpassed anything that they had ever dreamed of. Every one of the eleven children were anxious to ride inside with their grandparents, but Learned instructed the four older boys to ride in the rear compartment of the hearse—"So's I can keep an eye on ye an' keep ye out'n any mis'chif." Ruthie and Lillie asked to help with the dishes and began stacking them and clearing away the scraps while Mr. Meeks was taking on gas and oil and attaching the hearse to the trailer.

Mrs. Meeks took her four youngest children with her and got settled in the cab, took one of the numerous safety pins from the front of her dress and mended a slip strap that had broken while she pulled her big form inside the narrow opening in the driver's compartment. The boys were settled

in the rear compartment with a big checkerboard which they had fashioned from the side of a large paper carton. With the "men" made of circles of cardboard and then colored with scraps of crayons they carried in their pockets—they planned to have a lively game while they traveled.

Nate Meeks and his wife got up and walked to the rear of the coach, examining the many gadgets and strange innovations that the wealthy man had installed in the trailer. Zenobia took the time to patiently show the little old couple the two well appointed clothes closets, with hangers for suits, dresses, skirts and blouses, and racks for many pairs of shoes. When they saw one rack of twelve pair which obviously belonged to the owner of the trailer, Granny threw up her hands and exclaimed: "Oh my stars chil'e! They's 'nough shoes there for a santy-pede!"

They peeked into the many tiny drawers for lingerie, hose and handkerchiefs and at the transparent hatboxes with forms in them to hold big or little hats in shape. They simply stared and muttered "My! My!" when she showed them the shower stall, mist of water that could be turned on at will, the medicine cabinet with the etched mirror in the door, the gleaming, stainless steel lavatory and the bars of sweetly scented soap on the nearby soap dish in a niche in the wall. With eyes bright with pleasure and excitement, they sat down on the divan at the rear, so they could watch the landscape, the towns and all the other things that would interest them as they rumbled along.

Zenobia resumed her task of clearing away the dishes; again thankful that she had purchased the big trailer. Since it had been designed and intended as an adequate means of leisure vacations at the sea, the mountains or on the plains, for a man and his wife and their six children—and usually from one to six guests, she felt pleased and thankful that it would provide luxurious living for sixteen eager, west-bound travelers.

Learned finally thrust his head inside the door and announced:

"Wal Ma'am I guess we're all set! All th' kids are settled, an' I see thet Pa an' Ma have found a com'f'ble place t' ride!"

"Are you sure the trailer is hooked on securely?" Zenobia asked.

"Yep! She's solid as th' Rock o' Gee-bralter! Now don't ye worry none Miss; I be a purty good driver—if'n I do say so m'self! Why I've snaked logs out'n th' hills, drove a thrashin' m'chine all over Benton County—an' onc't I drove

one o' them thar com'b'nashun things up in Kansas—they're m'chines what cuts, thrashes an' sacks wheat all't onc't—an' I ain't had an accident yet!" He laid six dollars and twenty-two cents, the change from the money she had given him to purchase oil and gas with, on the end of the sink board and went to the front of the hearse to take a second look to make sure that nothing had been overlooked, while Zenobia went to the door of the station and said to the attendant who had first been so cross and then so polite to her: "Thanks Mister, for everything!"

"Gee! don't thank me! I guess I acted pretty awful; and I'm sorry! Thanks Miss, for the swell breakfast—and if any of you are ever back this way, stop and say hello! I wish each of you the best of luck on your journey and after you get to California!"

Zenobia motioned to Aggie, who was watching for the "go" signal from her side of the cab, then she entered her trailer and locked the door as was her habit while riding inside the big room.

Learned started the motor and, as he moved slowly forward, he looked out to make sure the trailer was following, then he turned onto the highway and drew away from the little filling station.

While Zenobia washed the dishes, Lillie dried them and Ruthie put them in place in the carefully arranged cupboards and drawers.

"Miss Starr, you sure do have a lot o' dishes for jes yer'self!" Lillie remarked.

"Yes, there are plenty of them. Service for eighteen of both china and silver; but the man who built this trailer had a big family; and I bought it fully equipped—linens, bedding, dishes, silver and pots and pans—and even a lot of canned food; and I got it for a fraction of what the trailer alone had cost—I intend to use it for a home when I get to California," she explained.

"When I get through school an' get a job teaching, I'm goin' t' buy a trailer. It won't be an expensive one like this is, for I'll have t' buy a car t' pull it an' that will cost a lot o' money—but my teacher in Piney told me that teachers in California schools get paid a heap more money than she gets. Besides, when they get too old to teach, they get a pension to live on. Now don't you think I selected a good profession? Teaching school is a profession ain't it Miss Starr?"

"Indeed it is! Yes, Lillie, teaching is a wonderful profes-

sion; and I'm sure that you will become a wonderful teacher!"

"Did you ever *want* to do something; want real hard to do or be something—like I want to be a teacher?"

"I most assuredly have! I have wanted to sing ever since I was a little girl, much younger than you are! That is why I can understand how much a teaching career means to you!"

"Oh, *can* you sing?" Lillie asked. "Will you sing something for me?"

"I'd love to! And now that the dishes have been washed and put away while the coach is moving, without anyone losing her balance, let's all sit down and visit. Play games or do whatever we like."

"What kind of songs do you sing?" the persistent Lillie wanted to know, as they sat down beside Gramp and Granny.

"What's this I be hearin'?" asked Granny, as she looked from her granddaughter to Zenobia with aroused curiosity in her blue eyes. "Is zat so—do ye sing?"

"Well, yes. As I told Lillie just now I like to sing; and hope to make a career of it, that's why I'm going to California."

"Did ye ever sing over one o' them raddeos?" Gramp Meeks wanted to know.

"Not over a National hookup; but I did sing over the local station in Tulsa a few times. But only a few evenings ago, I sang for the boys in the Veterans Hospital in Oklahoma; and that was an experience I'll never forget and—"

"Ye say ye sang fer them poor lads what was wounded in thet horrible war? Why bless ye m' dear; ye're even sweeter and kinder than I s'posed ye were! Ye make me mighty proud t' hear ye say thet!" the little old lady said, as she beamed her admiration for Zenobia.

"Miss Starr, what songs did you sing for the wounded boys? Would you sing one of them for us?" Lillie entreated.

"Well you see Lillie," Zenobia began to explain, "I have a habit of making up songs and melodies, 'improvising' is the correct word, I believe; and I sing whatever words come to mind, to a tune that the mood or subject suggests. One of the songs that the boys liked very much, was one that I call: 'THERE'S A BRIGHT STAR SHINING FOR YOU'."

"Oh that must be a beautiful song! I like stories, poems and songs about stars—they're so mysterious and—and, cheerful; and maybe that's one reason why I like you so

much—your name is Starr. And I think you're just about the prettiest lady that I've ever seen—even in pictures! Please sing your song about the bright star. We'd love to hear it, wouldn't we?"

As Lillie asked the final question, she glanced at her grandparents and her sisters; and there was a unanimous "Yes we would!" reply.

"Very well!" Zenobia replied, "But my songs might not sound very good—with no accompaniment except the noise of this trailer and of the cars on the highway. I'll do the best I can!"

Sara and Sallie, the two younger girls who had been sitting on the thickly carpeted floor, near the divan, looking at pictures in a stack of National Geographic magazines, laid their books aside and leaned back against big cushions that were between them and the wall. Gramp was trimming his short, jagged fingernails with a stag-handled pocket knife. Granny sat with her left hand under the elbow of her right arm, with her chin resting on her right thumb—the long, bony forefinger resting against her withered cheek. Zenobia stood up to sing—inspired by the beaming faces of her little audience, especially Lillie's; whose plans and dreams of teaching in a classroom, caused a light to shine in her blue eyes as if she was looking at a bright and beautiful star, which was shining in the Heavens just for her!

The six listeners sat in rapt silence while she sang, "THERE'S A BRIGHT STAR SHINING FOR YOU", with the same fervor and the bell-like clearness that she had sung it at the hospital. When she had finished, the four girls sat staring up at her, as though they had been enjoying a pleasant dream, from which they did not wish to be awakened. Grandfather Meeks clicked his knife shut and dropped it into the pocket of his faded jeans. Zenobia noticed a tear trickle down the wrinkled face of Utopia Meeks. The little woman who had lived all of the many years of her life close to nature, wiped the tear away with the corner of her apron and, smiling up into Zenobia's face, she said:

"Goodness sakes alive! Here I am a'cryin'! But dearie, you sing jes' like I all'ays b'lieved thet Angels sing! I know that I'm an' old woman; an' I caint' expect t' live many years, even in Callie-fornie; but your beautiful song makes me surer than ever that Heaven's jes over th' way; an' thet some o' its sweetness spills over ont' us mortals onc't in a while!"

"Thank you Mrs. Meeks; that's the sweetest compliment that I have ever received and I—"

"Honey, jes call me an' Nate, Gramp an' Granny—thet's what ever'one 'round Piney called us an' we sorter like it—don't we Nate?"

"Yep, we sure do, Utopia! It'd make me right proud t' have her call me Gramp. Why it'd make me feel as ef'n we might be a bit o' kin t' each other!"

"Oh thank you—thank you both! I'd love to call you Gramp and Granny! You see, I have neither parents nor grandparents living and—well, as you said Gramp, it *would* make it seem like we were related; and let me assure you that it would indeed, make me very proud and happy to claim kinship with such wonderful people as you and your big family are!" Zenobia reached down and clasped a rough and trembling hand in each of her soft, slender ones.

At their urgent request, she sang: "I'VE FOUND MY RAINBOW"; then they sat down near each other to visit and become better acquainted. Zenobia promised herself that she would keep in touch with the Meeks family—that she would become closer to them; as a member of their tribe.

"Tell me Granny, is Utopia your real name?" she asked.

"Hit sure is! M' mother wuz a school teacher—I'll al'ays b'lieve that Lillie here, inherited her d'sire t' teach frum her great gran'mother; an' she wuz also named after her. Anyway, as I started t' say, m' mother onc't read a story 'bout a land er a place called *Utopia*, an' likin' th' sound o' th' name, she saved it, an' bein' as how she married a man named Land, she named me Utopia Land, as sure's I'm a settin' here!"

"What an interesting story!" Zenobia exclaimed, "And I think Utopia is a pretty name!"

"An' speakin' o' names, didn't ye say thet yer first name wuz Zenobia Now thet's an odd name—was ye named after anyone in p'ticular?" Granny asked.

"No," Zenobia replied, "I wasn't named after anyone; but my mother once visited a Gypsie fortune teller, and she told mother that she would have a daughter whose life would reflect the rays of Jupiter. Having the last name of Starr, I suppose mother more or less believed in prophecy, and when she happened to run across the name Zenobia listed in the Christian names of women section of the dictionary and found what it meant: "Having life from Jupiter", I suppose she must have liked the name, for she tacked it onto me when I was baptised. Believe me folks, I'm going to try

real hard to live up to my name!"

As they glided along in the wake of a vapor of black smoke from the exhaust pipe on the old hearse, Zenobia noticed how slow they were traveling. Other cars and heavily loaded trucks whizzed past her at such a rate as to make it appear the trailer was almost standing still. She was positive that they never exceeded twenty-five miles per hour; and when going upgrade they slowed down to ten miles per hour or less—sometimes they were merely crawling—but they were still moving. Even if it took them a week or ten days to reach their western goal, she would not complain. The very fact Learned Meeks had admitted that he had had very little experience in driving automobiles, convinced her that he was exercising care and caution and would not hazard the lives or limbs of himself, his family or her, nor of wrecking her house-trailer by taking chances.

After "snakin'" logs and driving a combination harvester, it must appear to him that they were now traveling at an excessive speed. She mentally crossed her fingers and prayed that the ancient hearse would hold out until they reached California.

The hours and the miles passed. At mid-morning, when they had to stop to put water in the blubbering radiator, Zenobia opened a box of candy bars and passed them to each member of the party. The four boys who were riding in the rear compartment of the hearse had become tired of playing checkers, so they took several copies of the National Geographic their sisters had been looking at, to amuse them.

When the little wall clock above the sink pointed to eleven forty-five, Zenobia began preparing lunch. From the two big beef and pork roasts which Lupe had jammed into the icebox, atop the many bottles of milk, she made a tray of sandwiches; then she took three cream pies and two apple pies from the lower portion of the cupboard. After counting on her fingers to make sure she had the correct number in mind, she cut each of the pies into five pieces—enough to allow the men and older boys to have a second helping. She prepared celery and carrot sticks and opened jars of sweet and sour pickles and was measuring water into a big white enameled percolator, when Lillie, who was sitting on the rear divan, exclaimed: "Oh look Miss Starr! There's a truck following us and a man is waving at me!"

Zenobia glanced out and saw the small pick-up following very closely in the wake of the trailer. They were on a

down curve; and were going at a fairly good speed. She noticed a man's bare arm extended and waving in motions which might have meant "stop", "get out of the way", "move over" or any of a half dozen other signals. The sun shone on the windshield at such an angle, that she could not see the faces of the men in the truck.

Becoming more or less annoyed by the senseless motions of the passenger in the truck, she said to Lillie: "It's probably just some smart-alec trying to be cute! Don't pay any attention to him and they'll soon get tired of fanning their hands about and will pass us when we get off this curve and go on and mind their own business—or at least try their tricks on someone else!" Then she turned her attention to making some bread and butter and jelly sandwiches for the "littlest" twins.

Chapter Nine

RAINBOW ON THE HORIZON

ZENOBIA WAS BUSY spreading apple jelly on a slice of bread when she happened to glance out the window over the little sink in the house trailer. She had raised the venetian blind; and what she saw made her gasp. The pick-up truck had pulled alongside, and a man's figure, draped in a blanket of a mixture of horrible colors in a bold plaid design, swung down from the seat and motioned the driver to go on. Then he grasped the folds of the blanket in one hand while he waved with the other as he ran alongside the coach which was starting on an upgrade and was moving very slowly.

The girl at the window stared in mingled surprise, amusement and chagrin for a few moments; then lowering the glass window and calling to the man who was running along the highway with the blanket flying like a Roman toga as he looked beseechingly up at her and motioning for her to stop: "Hiram Hills! What do you think you're doing now?"

"S-s-t-o-p a-nd I'll t-tell you all a-b-o-u-t it!" he pleaded.

"Why silly! I can't control the motor of the car that is pulling this trailer from where I am—you should know *that* much!" she replied, wondering what ever caused him to appear in such a garb. Why he was away out here on the highway—when she had, only a few moments ago, supposed that he was at his service station back in Oklahoma.

"M-m-motion t-to th' driver t-to s-stop! P-l-e-a-s-e 'Nobia. I c-can, I want to ex-p-lain everything!" he panted breathlessly.

"Hi! you've been betting on Crosby's horses again!" she accused.

"No-o! Oh no! honest 'Nobia I-I've—been *ROBBED*!"

"A likely story! I suppose you'll be telling next that they took your gas station as well as your clothes—And that they didn't want that horrible blanket you've draped yourself in; for which I can't blame them!"

"I s-sold the s-station and started out to to f-follow you!" he panted; then getting a big breath he yelled: "I TELL YOU I WAS ROBBED!! Aw heck! they even t-took S-Sylvia!"

"Now I have heard everything!" Zenobia snapped, "Hi, you might have eventually convinced me that you were robbed of everything—but *not* that broken down pile of junk you call Sylvia! Why there isn't a person living who would have it as a gift, let alone *steal* it!"

"B-but t-they- some body d-did steal Sylvia!" he insisted breathlessly.

"Go peddle that line to someone else! I don't believe a word of what you've said; besides, I warned you that some gambler with about half sense, would clean you out by getting you to bet on those nags! So now that it has happened and you've made one silly donkey of yourself by appearing here in that—that atrocity of a covering, I don't want to hear another word! You go your own way and *don't* follow me!"

"Hey! w-wait, Zenobia!" he moaned, as she raised the pane of glass and shut out the sound of his voice. She wondered how it was that Learned Meeks had not happened to look back or to have heard the commotion and stopped; but when she considered the amount of noise that the motor in the old hearse made and noted that the road was a winding stretch of curves at that place, she was not surprised.

Gramp and Granny, the four girls and Zenobia watched the car pick up speed and Hi and his waving blanket was left behind. Zenobia explained very briefly, that the strange creature was an eccentric fellow whom she knew slightly, and that he was engaged in one of his many silly pranks.

A half mile further on, they reached the crest of the hill where a filling station was located. Mr. Meeks turned in and stopped before the gas pump, leaving the long trailer just

off the highway and almost against a row of trees and shrubs which surrounded the small wayside station and a half dozen tourist cabins, most of which appeared to be vacant.

Zenobia had given him twenty dollars when they stopped for gas the last time; and had instructed him to keep the change and apply it on the next purchases of gas. She had insisted from the start of the oddly equipped junket, that she would pay for all the gas and oil required to reach California, and the food for all the members of the party.

Both the gasoline tank and the radiator required filing. While the attendant was busy and the other members of the party were either in the restrooms, looking for colored prints and postcards, or gathering some of the autumn wild flowers and bright leaves that grew near the restrooms, Asa and Adam, the eldest twins, were playing with a little black and white spotted dog which belonged to the attendant. Zenobia put the coffee on to boil; then went out to where Learned was double checking the old motor and suggested that they eat lunch before proceeding any further.

"I have a big tray of sandwiches, pie and coffee made, so it will not take long to eat. I'm sure the children are hungry!" she assured him.

"Ye say ye have san'wiches an' pie?" Meeks asked.

"Lots of them!"

"Wal now thet bein 'th' case, why cain't we eat whils't we go along? Th' ol' Cad-lak don't need t' rest like a team o' mules would; an' she's warmed up an' doin' fine. Ef'n it's all th' same t' ye, I'd like t' keep goin' whilst th' goin's good! Why me an' Aggie an' the little'uns can eat in th' cab, an' I s'pose Pa an' Ma an' th' girls can make out all right back thar with ye. Th' boys are playin' like th' back o' the hearse is a dugout, so they'd like t' eat their san'wiches an' pie in thar!"

"Just as you say, Mr. Meeks. If you would rather go on, I'll bring your food and coffee and milk for the children out and take a tray to the boys, then the rest of us will eat in the trailer." Zenobia hurriedly placed the food in each section of the hearse and served Gramp and Granny so they could be eating while the car was being serviced.

When they were again under way, she happened to remember Hi, and she looked out the rear window to see if she could see him coming up the road. Since she could see nothing of the plaid blanket, and was sure that he had not

been in any of the few cars that had passed the station while they were there, she decided that he had given up trying to stop her so he could deliver that fantastic explanation he had cooked up, and gone back. She had a notion that the car Sylvia was parked somewhere down the hill; and that, by this time, he and Sylvia were headed back to the Hills Service station on 66.

The four girls were seated on cushions on the floor, near their grandparents, at the rear of the coach. All were eating their sandwiches while they eyed the generous cuts of chocolate, cocoanut or banana cream pies with the fluffy meringue—which each had had the privilege of choosing. Zenobia took a roast beef sandwich, cut it in half diagonally, took a half bottle of milk, a glass and a candy bar and sat down at the little desk. The bulging folds of the green curtains were at her back. She placed the food on the polished surface of the desk and sat thinking.

Try as she could, she could not put Hi entirely out of her mind. A wave of uneasiness flashed over her, as she began to wonder if he might possibly have been telling the truth—partial truth at least! Recalling all the nice things that Hi had done for her, drove all the anger and annoyance out of her mind, and she began to wish that she had given him a reasonable opportunity to explain.

She attempted to read a short-short story in a magazine, while she nibbled at the three-cornered wedge of delicious sandwich. When she had finally finished that half, she reached for the other half—but it was gone! She was not sure that she hadn't eaten it; although she still didn't think she had. She poured a half a glass of milk and sipped it slowly—trying to read while trying to convince herself that she *had* eaten the sandwich. Then she started to pour another glass of milk—and found the bottle empty! Then she discovered that the candy bar was gone! A puzzled frown settled over her face. Gramp and Granny and the four girls were at the far end of the coach; eating their pie slowly, so they could enjoy every mouthful of it. She shook the empty bottle, looked for the candy bar in the magazine, and not finding so much as the wrapper, she arose deliberately and stepped back to the cabinet across the aisle and looked down at the floor around the base of the desk and under the chair on which she had been sitting. There beneath the folds of the green curtains, stood a pair of

old battered shoes, two big toes peering, like turtles heads, through the holes in the toes and three inches of hairy shins showing above them!

Zenobia stifled a cry of surprise, gritted her teeth and opening the drawer and seizing the little hammer firmly in one hand, she crept forward. "More cockroaches!" she exclaimed as she gave each protruding toe a whack with a hammer!

"Wow!" An anguished voice wailed; and out stepped Hi, trying to rub his toes and hold the blanket in place at the same time. "Aw 'Nobia! Why did you do that! Haven't I suffered enough already?"

As the blanket draped figure stepped out into view, Lillie tossed her pie plate and her fork into her grandmother's lap and, with her three sisters following her every action, she sprang up and dashed into the nearby shower and the inside lock clicked into place.

Having faced many dangers of a sudden and terrifying nature during his long life, Nate Meeks instinctively searched for some sort of weapon with which to defend himself and the others on the big coach from attacks or abuse from the strange man who had suddenly appeared in their very midst. For lack of anything better, or more deadly, he seized a thick volume of "PILGRIM'S PROGRESS" from the ledge under the window and started to his shaky feet; while Utopia was gathering up the corners of her apron to catch the pile of dishes that had been tossed into her lap.

Zenobia began to laugh and attempted to calm the frightened old couple by saying: "Don't be frightened folks! He's perfectly harmless; and he doesn't look half so frightful when he's dressed in ordinary clothes, instead of that blanket!"

Granny was first to remember the four girls who were huddled in the shower stall. Grasping the apron corners to keep from spilling the dishes, she staggered over and pounded on the narrow mahogany panelled door as she called: "Come on out'n thar gals 'afore ye suffer-cate! Miss Z'nobie says th' man ain't dan'g'rus! Come out'n thar all o' ye!"

The panel slid open and four frightened faces peered out. When they saw Zenobia laughing and talking to the man who had been following them a short time ago, they ventured over and sat down gingerly on the edge of the divan,

to watch for anything unusual that might happen. Zenobia took the dishes from Granny's apron and stacked them in the sink; then turning to Hi, who had sunk down wearily on the chair at the desk, she said: "Are you still hungry? If you are, I'll make *us* another sandwich!"

"I'm famished! And these so-called shoes are simply killing my feet—and furthermore, I don't enjoy being wrapped in this confounded blanket, like a thousand year old mummy!"

"Here's the food; but I'm afraid I can't do a thing about the clothes. None of my clothes would fit you any better or be any more becoming than that blanket!"

"Oh holy mackerel! What am I going to do? 'Nobia are you sure that there aren't any of—of your father's old clothes, perhaps a pair of old pants or a suit of coveralls; lying around in the trailer?"

"I'm positive there isn't! I did just what father had often told me he wanted me to do. I gave all of his clothing to a charitable organization where they could be distributed to someone who could use them. "

"Someone who could use them!" Hi repeated dejectedly, "Aw well I suppose there's nothing for me to do but get used to this blanket. I sure feel sorry for those poor Indians who wore them for so long a time. No wonder a lot of them preferred to go naked!"

As they rambled on, Hi tried to explain in detail how the Dobbins family took over the lunchroom and began their high-handed method of changing just about everything except the rising and setting of the sun. Then he told of his selling the service station, so he could at least join her in California; his trouble with Sylvia—of having learned from the station attendant where the tow car had left her, that an obliging husband and wife had agreed to pull her to California; then paused in the account of his adventures or misadventures to ask:

"But 'Nobia, the fellow at the station told me that there was only a couple of middle aged people in a big blue coupe. How come—I mean, instead of a blue coupe, there's a big black something-or-other hitched to the trailer and, there's more than two people here. How did he happen to make so big a mistake?"

"He didn't Hi! It was I who made the mistake of trusting those two skinflints and paying them one hundred and fifty

dollars of my precious cash! And, believe it or not, I was so completely confident that I had made a good bargain and would be in California within a matter of hours, that I went to bed at ten thirty and slept until sun up. Then I awoke to find that the blue coupe and its double crossing occupants had left me sitting beside a closed gas station away out in the country!"

"Oh no! How could anybody do such a thing to you! Gosh Honey! I'm sorry about that. I know now that I had a hunch that you would meet with delays and disappointments; that's why I sold out and followed you!"

"Well, now that it is over, it doesn't seem so bad; for these folks happened along and I had a tire that they needed. When they found that I wanted to go to California too—that's where they're going, well, we made a real convenient bargain; and here I am, not going so fast perhaps, but *going*! Now, Hi, tell me where you got held up. Were they a couple of convicts who escaped from a penitentiary? Were they wearing that striped prison garb like we see in the movies? Did they want your clothes to disguise themselves in and Sylvia to make their get-away in?

"No-o!" Hi said, looking abashed and very uncomfortable, "You probably won't believe this; but it's the truth, so help me! I did *not* see whoever it was that stole my car and clothes! The only thing that I saw was what looked like tracks of two men near Sylvia's tracks—but—well, I hadn't slept at all the night after you left; then I worked like the dickens the next day, in order to wind up the business of selling the station and getting started. I was dog tired when I headed west, determined to overtake you. Then when I learned that you were in good hands and were being pulled by a good car, I relaxed a bit. It was then that Sylvia took one of her tempermental spells; that was when the real hassle began! I worked like a beaver before a cloud burst, before I found the trouble. I was so tired and sleepy; but happy to know that you were all right."

"So you pulled over to one side of the road and wrapped that *ugh* colored blanket around you and went to sleep? she prompted.

"No-o, not exactly," he said. "I drove on to the top of a hill and parked at least fifty yards from the road. I got out my cot; which I had brought along; but I did overlook my bed-roll, that was behind the door when I opened it—the door I

mean. And I wanted to look neat and clean when I caught up with you, so I took off my brown suit and, by the rays of my flashlight, I even removed some grease spots that I had got on my pants while working on the car. I hung everything up in the car—and Honey, I even put my wallet inside one of my shoes and set it right beside the cot; just like you told me to do!”

“And they, or he, took the shoes and wallet? I see you’re still wearing your wristwatch. How did they happen to overlook that? Perhaps they had one of their own!”

“He, or they evidently did not see the watch—you see it was cold out there and not having on any clothes except my skiv—my shorts and shirt, I had the blanket wrapped around me as tight as an onion skin; and I used my arms for a pillow. Oh! if I only had my pants and shoes!”

“Well,” she said sympathetically, “as fantastic as it does sound, I still believe you! Knowing what a sound sleeper you are, I wouldn’t have been a bit surprised had they removed your suit while you slept—and then put Sylvia through all her tricks, before they drove away! I’m sorry about it all—honest I am!”

“Thanks honey! it makes me feel a lot better to know that you don’t doubt my word—that you don’t think that I lost everything on Crosby’s horses. By the way, does that affair that’s pulling your trailer burn coal?” Hi asked, as the black smoke rolled out and obscured the view from the front window; and their speed became a mere crawl. The hill they were ascending was steep and long; and the steeper it grew, the more smoke there was—then, to Zenobia’s horror, they stopped. She ignored Hi’s question and opened the door and called:

“What’s the trouble Mr. Meeks—is there anything wrong with the car?”

“Nope! Don’t think so! jes be patient whil’st I take a peek at th’ motor!” Meeks replied. He got out and untied the rope that held the two suitcases in place, so he could open the rattly hood on the old Cadillac.

“Don’t you think I’d better go see if I can be of any help?” Hi asked, even if he did dread to move off the chair while wearing the blanket.

Zenobia was afraid that what she feared most—that the old motor could not pull the heavy load, and had failed them. She nodded to Hi and led the way. For the moment

Hi forgot his own strange appearance, as he followed the girl past the long window where several faces stared at him, then to the front of the cab where the robust woman and four more children sat looking at him. He mumbled something about: "There always being somethin new under the sun" when Learned Meeks straightened up from where he had been bent over the motor, and squinted at Zenobia, then at Hi. He pushed the big grey hat back from his brow and scratched his temple as he sized up the man in the blanket, from his tousled hair to the exposed big toes, and, deciding that this must be a trick—some crazy notion of the unpredictable modern age, he drawled: "Wal, I'll be gol-durned! A person sure does see some funny sights on th' road!"

Hi ignored the remark. It would have taken too long to explain so he cleared his throat, looked at the motor in about the same fashion that a physician looks at his patient, and said: "I'm an automobile mechanic, even if my disguise might cause you to doubt it. Could I help with the motor?"

"Yes, Mr. Meeks, this is Mr. Hills. I knew him in Oklahoma where he operated a service station across the road from my lunchroom, and he is an auto mechanic. You see, he overtook us at lunchtime, after he had had a streak of bad luck; someone stole his car, clothes and his money, while he slept. I'm sure he would be glad to help you!"

Meeks accepted the brief explanation; and, determined to accept the stranger, whom Zenobia had vouched for, he extended his big friendly right hand, as he said: "Ye don' tell me! Wal b'lieve me I'm right sorry t' hear o' yor' bad luck Mr. Hills! By granny! I don't know what th' world's a comin' to—what with all th' meanness thet's goin' on! But ye can d'pend on me—I been teachd t' share m' worldly goods, sitch as they be, with m' fellow man! So young feller, if'n ye'd jes as leave wear em as thet blanket, ye air welcome t' m' 'tother pair o' overalls!"

"Thanks Mr. Meeks; that is very kind of you! I sure would be glad to borrow some clothes until I can get something to wear—but first, let's see what's wrong with the motor!"

Learned introduced Hi to his wife Aggie, who had been trying vainly to suppress the smile that persisted in spreading from ear to ear over her round face. He told her to get out and look in the grey valise and get his other pair of overalls and the blue shirt for the young man to wear.

Hi tried to hold the blanket in place while he inspected the motor; and when Zenobia saw what a difficult time he was having, she walked around to where Aggie was bent over the open valise and asked to borrow three of the safety pins which the mother of eleven husky children carried attached to her red checkered dress front.

"Take as many as you want!" she said as she straightened up so Zenobia could unpin them. "That poor man; I feel so sorry for him!"

"So do I!" Zenobia agreed, as she selected three of the largest pins and removed them. "But Hi is young, ambitious and—well, I hate to think what he will do to whoever it was that robbed him—just in case he ever finds them!"

She had Hi straighten up, then she pulled the blanket around his body, crossed it in the front and placed one of the safety pins so that it held the top edge of the blanket close around his chest, under his armpits—something like a strapless evening gown. She put the second pin in the folds at his waistline and the third just below his hips, stepped back and looked to make sure that the blanket was safely anchored, and said: "There now! Your arms are free—if you don't sneeze or try to crawl under the car, you'll be safe enough!"

While Hi bent over the motor, Learned was proudly explaining the fact that he was using a product that was guaranteed to save one third on gasoline.

"An' by jimminy hit works too! Course it does smoke a might; but 'taint nothin' compared t' some o' th' cars I seed! How 'bout it Mr. Hills, find anything broke?"

"No-o; all eight cylinders seem to be working O.K. The fuel pump is in good shape—but I think the carburetor needs adjusting—the high altitude here is different—most cars need adjusting when climbing the mountains! There, that should improve it!"

"Want me t' turn 'er over a few times t' see if'n she's O.K.?" Meeks asked. Hi nodded. The big man climbed inside the cab and started the motor with one plunge of the starter. The faithful old machine sounded much different from what it did just before it wheezed, belched a cloud of smoke and died. A broad smile spread over the owner's face and Hi looked pleased and motioned for him to shut it off; then walking to the side of the cab, he asked: "Mr.

Meeks, when was the last time you added any of that fuel saver to the gas?"

"Oh I dunno! it was back yonder a ways—'afore we found th 'young lady stranded with her trailer. Why, do ye think it is time I wuz givin' 'er a'nother dose?"

"No, if it's what I think it is, it works well on short trips and without being over loaded; but this motor is carrying a terrific load—and up these hills at that; and there'll be more, and steeper hills before you get to California, so I'd advise you to give the car the best gasoline available and plenty of oil. If you were driving a team of mules, and they were pulling a double load, you wouldn't think of feeding them straw instead of oats would you?"

"No sir-ee! When I wuz on a farm—an' thet has been all o' th' forty two years o' m' life, I've all'ays fed m' teams well, an' never 'spected 'em t' pull more'n their share! No Sir-ee! Oh, I see what yer drivin' at! Guess th' Scotch blood in m' veins wuz urg'in' me t' forgit thet it's a machine instead o' a pair o' mules I'm drivin' now, an' I should e-kon-mize a bit!"

"Mr. Meeks, don't you spare one cent on oil and gas for this trip! I'm paying for them and I want you to give the car the best gas to be found in the pumps along the way!" Zenobia said, as Aggie appeared, holding up a pair of huge bib overalls in her hand and a folded blue chambray shirt under one arm. The garments were exactly like the ones her husband was wearing.

Hi accepted the proffered garments with sincere thanks; and Zenobia led the way to the trailer where she got out a clean bath towel and wash cloth and invited him to make use of the shower.

In ten minutes, Hi emerged, dressed in the borrowed clothes; both shirt and pants were at least three sizes too big; but he agreed that they looked and felt better than the blanket.

Learned glanced down at Hi's pitiful looking shoes saying: "Sorry I ain't got an extra pair o' shoes fer ye—an, some better clothes t' offer ye; but we shipped all our Sunday clothes, 'cause we didn't figure we'd be needin' 'em on th' trip. These hi-cut shoes is all I have; don't go in fer buyin' a lot o' duds all't onc't—an I all'ers git 'em big 'nough!"

Mr. Meeks was anxious to get started; so he could test the adjusted motor and get to "Callie-fornie" all the sooner, so

the grandparents, Zenobia and Hi returned to the trailer and, in response to a shrill whistle from their father, the Meeks children appeared from various directions and took their places in the hearse or trailer. The suitcases were put in place and they were again on their way. The motor behaved beautifully, and they got up a good speed—at least thirty miles per hour, and covered many interesting miles before supper time.

They reached the post which marks the Great Divide, atop the massive Rocky Mountains range, an hour before dark. The four older children, who had studied geography in school, were looking for something more than a huge stone pillar with the words: "Continental Divide" carved on it. They had expected something as distinguishable as stepping from a room with green wallpaper and Eighteenth Century furniture, into an adjoining room done in desert pink tones with ultra-modernistic furnishings. Asa and Adam insisted on pouring a bucket of water on the ground beside the rock to prove the theory that half of the drainage went west while the other half flowed to the Eastern side of the invisible line. The water disappeared into the sandy ground, leaving two very disappointed boys standing staring at the three foot wet spot on the ground.

Nate Meeks and his wife, Utopia, stood looking about in awesome meditation—like two transfigured souls who were ready to function in different characters. To the East, lay the dim trail back to the place and activities of their childhood, young adulthood and where they had finally arrived at the advanced ages of grandparents. Like looking at pictures of their past through a stereoscope, a few years spent in a little rustic rural school, of a country courtship, of the arrival of their children, of many years of hard work; and the wholesome task of rearing a family of honest children to become a credit to their community, a sturdy pillar in the strictly disciplined church. And, as a glorious climax, they saw themselves, as inseparable as the Siamese twins through fifty three years of harmonious married life. To the West, they saw a mental kaleidoscope view of their shining goal; the place where they expected to pause for a short time before they continued on to their final reward. The golden rays of the setting sun were pointing and lighting the way across another Great Divide; that Crystal stream over which the Faithful pass after having faithfully and

generously fulfilled their earthly tasks. They stood apart from the others, hand in hand, looking about them. Nate shaded his dimming eyes with a gnarled hand and peered into the blue and white canopy above them; and in a husky voice he whispered: "Utopia, m' faithful wife, I feel as ef I wuz right on the doorsteps o' th 'Pearly Gates!"

"Me too, Nate! An' we can look up with a clean conscience! We hain't done er said nothin' t' be 'shamed of; an' we have a lot t' be mighty proud of!"

Zenobia had the car serviced with gas, oil and water, and had the utility tank of the trailer filled with the clear mountain water, while she went into the curio shop and purchased postcards and trinkets for the children and a miniature of the stone marker for Gramp and Granny. At the small grocery store, she bought several loaves of bread, six quarts of milk and two of cream, before they moved on to a spot a half mile from the little community, to where on a small plateau, the new highway cut off a corner, leaving a hundred yards of the old pavement near a steep cliff.

Zenobia had asked Learned to stop at the most suitable place they came to, so they could cook a substantial supper and allow everyone to relax a bit after the long hours spent riding. He headed the old hearse onto a strip of abandoned roadway; and when the rear end of the trailer was at least fifty yards from the new highway, he applied the brakes, shut off the motor and scrambled out; as Zenobia opened the door, he asked: "How's this fer a camp site? Plenty o' room fer th' kids t' play where they won't be in nobody's way."

"This is just fine Mr. Meeks! Now you and Mrs. Meeks get out and walk around, just relax while I cook some potatoes and fry steaks!"

From the window over the sink, Zenobia could see far out over the rugged broken lines of hills and canyons. The approaching sunset cast mysterious purple shadows over part of the panorama, and bright, golden glints over other spots. The progress she had made, the fact that Hi was with her and the very inspiring aspect of her surroundings, prompted her to sing two verses of a hymn that she had often sung in church, as she peeled enough potatoes to fill a large granite kettle. She paused when she heard the unmistakable sound of a violin being tuned. She clamped the lid on the kettle of potatoes and stepped outside the door. Gramp was

sitting on a small boulder at the side of the old paved road-bed, with his "fiddle", as he called the instrument, in his hands. It seemed that her feeling of jubilation, her desire to sing or shout, was contagious, for Seth was doing a clever bit of yodeling—pausing now and then to listen to his voice echo and re-echo among the cliffs and craigs.

The other children had taken a twelve foot length of calf rope, the only thing resembling a toy among them and, while Asa and Adam turned, the others raced through in a fast rope-skipping act. Ruthie proved herself an expert at doing "high-water" while Lillie's nimble feet tripped a graceful "Hot-pepper". The littlest twins insisted on toddling into the game, and retired only when they had stumbled, fell and bruised their hands on the rough pavement. Finally, Learned took one end of the rope as Aggie took the other end and they turned to suit the age, requirements or desires of each of their children. Sara and Sallie did a double-trip duet, Asa and Adam did a neat, and very difficult "rocking horse" jump.

Granny watched her grandchildren jump the rope; and anxious to relax in the only exercise she really enjoyed, she turned to her husband and said: "Sakes alive Nate! hurry an' git thet fiddle tuned up so's I kin dance!"

Zenobia could hardly believe her ears! That this aged and spindle-legged couple could or would dance, had never entered her mind.

"Now, this is going to be good!" Hi remarked, as they watched Gramp test each string—tighten two and loosen one—draw the bow across the instrument with the touch of an artist. Then he applied just the right amount of resin to the bow strings; and, like caressing a baby's head, he leaned his chin against the polished wooden base and paused as he asked:

"What d' ye want me t' play, Utopia—yar ol' fav'rite?"

"That's right Nate—an' play it fast an' furious! I ain't felt more like dancin' in m' whole life!" Granny said. She tossed her bonnet to the ground beside her husband, pushed the two long pins more firmly into the tiny knot of grey hair at the back of her neck, removed the silver-rimmed spectacles, dropped them into Gramp's shirt pocket, took the big white handkerchief from her apron pocket, wiped her flushed face—then motioning him to wait a second, she stooped over and hitched up her black cotton stockings, which had sagged into deep wrinkles above the tops of her

wide-toed and badly scuffed black shoes; then she straightened up and waited until the recognizable strains of "DARK TOWN STRUTTERS BALL", sounded above the voices of the children who were still jumping the rope.

Suddenly Utopia Land Meeks began to move; her loose black shoes began to shuffle on the old pavement—then, as the tempo picked up, she whirled, jigged and capered, her frail body swaying in rhythmic motion while the wide folds of her blue print skirt swished, fluttered and swung—sometimes creeping to her bony knees, revealing the tops of the cotton hose dangling down her shins, from where her garters, which were made from strips of cloth, tied around her legs just below the knees, were supposed to keep her stockings in place. The big wrinkles above the shoe tops soon returned; but no one paid any attention to them. Hi and Zenobia stood watching the ease and abandon with which the little old lady danced. The rope jumping was discontinued while the entire Meeks family gathered around to watch the ever new and exciting sight of seeing Granny dance.

A round of applause greeted the performer as the violin struck the final note and the dancer added a few tricky steps to the old folk dance. Zenobia rushed up and planted a kiss upon the wrinkled face of the happy Granny; who could still breathe more normally than many a person of half her age, after such a strenuous performance. "Oh Granny! That was beautiful! the girl exclaimed.

"I wish that I could be sure that I would be even half as agile and ambitious, when I'm forty!" Hi added.

Learned patted his mother on the back and said:

"Now Ma give Miss Starr an' Mr. Hills a real treat! Do thet Darby Dance fer 'em!"

"Oh yes, Granny please do! Do th' Darby Dance!" the children begged.

"All right! Nate tune up yer fiddle—they's no use tryin' t' refuse!"

"Now ye git yer breath Utopia. An' look, yer stockins' are saggin' agi'n!" Gramp said, pointing the fiddle bow at his wife's wrinkled hose. While Granny stepped over to the side of the circle of relatives and stooped and tied the garter strings tighter, Gramp explained to Hi and Zenobia, who were wondering what was meant by the "Darby Dance", for neither of them had ever heard of such a dance.

"Thet Darby dance thet Utopia does, is one o'her own

'raingments an' she got th' idee 'bout forty years ago when we wuz in Little Rock. We'd both o' us been s'penied as witnesses in a shootin' scrape—two fellers shot it out with each other over who wuz t' drive a herd o' hungry, fence-jumpin' 'cattle an' a herd o' swine int' th' open range an' pasture 'em free, an' th' wust part o' th' deal wuz, neither 'o them outsiders had any right t' bring their stock int' thet township; but they tried t' an' both o' 'em got shot up, but not kill't—an' they called each other a lot o' bad names; which sounded as silly as a pot callin' a kettle black. Next, each o' them sued th' other fer tresspassin', a'tempt t' 'do bodily harm, slander, 'sault an' battery—He, he! As one newspaper feller said: They throwed a shelf full o' law books at each other, then smacked each other over th' head with th' book-cases! Well sir, ever'body fer miles 'round wuz s'penied b' one er th' tother, er both; an' me an' Utopia wuz no 'ceptions!"

"Of course, if you were subpoenaed, you would have to appear". Zenobia remarked, as the old fellow paused.

"Yep, that's right; and we wuz t' get paid fer it too! So we loaded some beddin' a few pots an' pans an' th' youngun's we had then, int' a wagon an' headed fer Little Rock t' test'fy. We camped b'side a little crick at th' edge o' town; an' since we wuz 'loud so much a day fer fees, we d'cided t' make a sort o' vacation out'n th' trip. Course we didn't have t' be in th' court room at night, so we d'cided t' see th' town—an' we did! Why we even went int' one o' them show houses what don't have no roof over it; they call it a'air—something-or-other-I don't recollect what—"

"An airdome Gramp!" Seth prompted.

"Yep thet wuz it—a Airdome! An' hit cost a lot o' nickles, dimes an' two-bit pieces fer us all t' git in; but hit wuz worth ever' penny of it!" Gramp exclaimed, then paused and smiled reminiscently then continued: "Yep folks, thet wuz a show thet I'll never fergit! an' Utopia could hardly set still when a dancer named Ruby Darby come a struttin' an' a prancin' ont' th' stage! My, how thet gal could dance! But with all her fancy clothes, practisin' an' havin' a seven piece band t' play fer her, she didn't do a thing thet Utopia couldn't a done jes as well—mebbe better; ef'n she' a practised a little!"

"And that was where Granny learned to do the Darby dance?" Zenobia asked.

"Ye guessed it! She didn't fergit a step er a motion; an'

when we got back home, I fiddled while she danced—now watch an' see fer yer selves!"

He drew the bow across the violin and began a low, moaning wail; to which Utopia, with hands on her hips, slithered out onto the imaginary stage and went through all the comical and difficult movements which had won so much applause and well paid contracts for the readheaded dancer of that era. Utopia Meeks literally dropped the years that had put wrinkles in her face and hands, the gray hair and made her body less plump and curvacious. She danced to the fast tempo of the violin—sometimes she jigged across the stage with her hands on hips and her chin and chest protruding, she did a clever twostep, a clog and strutted about in wild abandon. When the dance finally ended, she paused and curtsied, then said, in tones of surprise:

"Why ain't th' rest o' ye dancin'? Now don't tell me thet ye're gettin' too old t' dance!"

Learned responded to the challenge by taking Aggie in his arms nad whirling her about a few times; and by this time, Gramp had begun sawing away on the old familiar "hoe-down" the "*Turkey In The Straw*".

Hi took Zenobia by the hand and said: "Come on honey; let's see what we can do in the way of fancy stepping!"

"Oh, just a moment Hi! I left a pot of potatoes on the stove. I'll see about them, and be right back!" She ran to the trailer, found the potatoes had plenty of water in them, stirred them, turned the flame a bit lower then rushed back outside where a four partner square dance set was forming. Seth had stopped yodeling and was standing beside his grandmother. Learned and Aggie were the west partners while Asa and Lillie stood at the east side of the square. Adam had scurried to the rear compartment and got his Jews harp and Asa's harmonica out of which Ruthie was trying to coax the right notes.

When Zenobia had taken her place beside Hi, Gramp looked at Ruthie with her harmonica on his left and at Adam on his right elbow who was twanging away at the little lyre-shaped instrument which he held between his teeth. Gramp beat a few rhythmic raps on his knee to show his helpers the correct time, then called: "All right! one-two-three! Play!"

The first few bars played by the three-piece orchestra, were a bit discordant; then they hit off in harmony as

Learned's deep voice began bellowing: "SWING YER PARTNER — WALTZ HER 'ROUND AND 'ROUND AGAIN—MEET YER PARTNER AT TH' OL' GARDEN GATE—SWING ER NOW AN' DON'T BE LATE! DO SI DO AN' DO SI BACK AGAIN! CROW HOP IN AN' BIRDIE HOP OUT! MEET YER PARTNER AN' WALTZ 'ER HOME!"

Zenobia was caught in the dizzy whirl; one minute she was waltzing with Hi, who had rolled up the legs of the big overalls three turns, which made the outfit look like a clowns' suit—the broken shoes completing the outfit; then when she met Learned, he fairly lifted her off the ground and whirled her around. The big man was as nimble as a kitten and he not only called the dance, but also added a number of fancy steps, occasional kicks and sidling movements to add spice to the dance. Seth, Asa and Lillie had inherited their parents' and grandparents love for dancing and were giving a splendid account of themselves.

Not to be entirely omitted from the festivities, little seven-year-old Johnnie teamed up with his younger sister Essie, while Sara and Sallie formed a pair, and they danced around and around in the center of the ring of elders; and not to be outdone, Danny and Nanny, the "littlest" twins toddled into the midst, and, holding hands or putting their arms around each other's necks, they began to stomp and kick.

Learned wasn't content to end the impromptu dance without a whirl to the stirring tune of "THERE'LL BE A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN TONIGHT!" Gramp stood up and patted his foot as he played this number; and the strings of his violin echoed the thrilling feeling of his mind and fingers. Ruthie swayed and patted with her foot as she coaxed the familiar notes from the mouth harp; and Adam jiggled as he twanged at the instrument in his mouth.

When this number was finally finished, everyone was in high spirits and a sizable cloud of dust had been kicked up by the dancers. Darkness was now falling, as if Nature was slowly drawing the curtain on the stage where the actors were natural and the finale was a happy one.

When Gramp put away his fiddle, the children began to clamor for food; and Aggie began washing soiled faces and hands. Zenobia and Hi stood for a moment admiring the panorama of setting sun, deep shadows and grey mountains over which numerous birds sailed as graceful as swans on a lake. She'd noticed that Learned looked a bit tired and that

he yawned as he strode towards the trailer door.

Hi had noticed too, for he said: "Nobia, suppose you and I take a turn at driving tonight, while Mr. Meeks gets some sleep. It must be pretty tiresome for him and his wife and those four little children sitting up there in so small a place hour after hour. There's plenty of beds in the trailer for the family to sleep comfortable, aren't there?"

"Oh Hi! I think that is a splendid idea! Of course there are plenty of beds! I'll see what he says about it. You know he feels much the same about his Cadillac as you do—did about Sylvia, but we can try. Oh, Mr. Meeks!"

"Yes ma'am Miss Zenobia," the tired-faced man replied.

"If you have no objections, Hi and I would like to take a turn at driving tonight, while you and Mrs. Meeks and the other members of your family get some rest! There are six beds in the house trailer, and you must all be worn out, how about it?"

"Well now that's right nice o' ye both!" Learned replied, beaming first at Zenobia then at Hi, "An' bein' as how Mr. Hi is a mechanic, I know he kin manage th' ol' Cad-lak as good as I kin! Th' prop'sition suits me t' a T—an' I knows Aggie will welcome some rest after holdin' both o' th' littlest twins on her lap an' havin' t'other two young'uns leanin' on her fer th' las' two days and nights! Yep! Ef'n it ain't imposin' on ye two good natured folks, why I'd like t' do jes that!"

Aggie was making slow progress in getting her brood of active children washed up; for when she turned one loose with a clean face and hands, he or she usually fell down in the dust or picked up something dirty, while the next one was being washed. Zenobia offered a solution to this by offering the use of the shower with its galvanized tub which was sixteen inches deep and just the right size for the smaller children to take a regular bath in. When her husband informed her that Hi and Zenobia were to drive while the Meeks family slept, she began preparing her children for the nice clean beds, by disrobing Danny and Nanny and putting them in the tub and giving them a thorough scrubbing from head to toe. Upon seeing the twins getting to use the shower, the next four youngest children set up a howl to take a bath also.

While Zenobia and Hi fried the steaks, Lillie made a big bowl of cole slaw and set the table. The bathing of the children was carried on by the assembly line system. The heavy green curtains were drawn across the end where the bath-

room was located, and clean clothes laid out on one end of the long divan. While Granny stripped the soiled clothing from one child, Aggie scrubbed, rinsed and dried him and passed him on to Ruthie who helped him into clean clothes. Then Aggie, sweaty, dusty and tired, took a hasty bath and donned a blue checked gingham dress, made exactly like the red one she had discarded; then she combed her square-cut, mouse colored hair and put her children in place for their supper.

Before the dessert of cake and canned pears was finished, the clean and well-fed youngsters began to yawn sleepily; and just as soon as the table could be cleared, Zenobia and Hi lowered the table top and a double-deck three-quarter bed appeared in its place. The littlest twins were put to bed on the lower bunk—with their heads facing in opposite directions. The next two youngest children, dressed in pajamas, made from bleached feed sacks, were put to sleep in the same manner in the upper berth.

While the other members of the Meeks families went outside for a short, relaxing walk and to digest their dinners, so they too could take a bath before retiring, Hi helped Zenobia lower the other two upper berths and open the divans to make up more beds. Sara and Sallie climbed into the bunk above the bed their parents were to occupy; and, enjoying the luxurious foam rubber mattress and the caress of the soft percale sheet, were asleep before the others returned and began taking their baths.

"Here Mr. Hi, ye better take this jumper—th' night air gits a bit chilly while yer drivin'" Mr. Meeks said, handing Hi a faded blue denim jacket with an assortment of replaced buttons and a patch of brighter material on one elbow.

"Thanks a lot Mr. Meeks! Now just go to sleep and don't worry. I'll drive slowly and make sure that the engine has plenty of oil and water!"

"I ain't skeered o' your drivin' Mr. Hi! I know thet me an' m' family is in good han' with you at th' wheel o' th' ol' Cad-lak!" Learned assured Hi. Zenobia got her purse and a heavy sweater and, after showing the family how to turn on the lights over each bed, latch the door from within and had arranged for a flash-light signal through the front window, in case they wished them to stop, she joined Hi, who was giving the motor a last minute checkup.

The three older boys took baths then went to sleep in the rear section of the hearse, where their mother had made a

comfortable bed of one of the featherbeds and several blankets. They could stretch out lengthwise instead of having to lie huddled up crosswise as they had done during the previous nights.

Granny insisted on having her featherbed brought in and placed on top of the springy mattress on the rear davenport. After she had taken the first shower bath in her life and had donned a white muslin nightgown, made Mother Hubbard style, with tucks and embroidery insertions and edging the front yoke, an embroidery frill around the neck and the long sleeves, she crawled into bed and lying back on her pillow, she sighed contentedly: "Why this is as neat an' com'fable as a hummin' bird's nest!"

Gramp emerged from the bathroom, dressed in a long nightshirt, which had been made of flour sacks. Across the center of his back was a picture of a sheaf of golden wheat and in blue letters, were the words: "Pride of The Ozarks"; while in front, across the knees, were the black lettered words: "Triple Milled".

Lillie and Ruthie took their baths, put a few pin curls in the front of their hair, and taking some magazines to read, like they had seen a movie star do in one of the pictures they had run across that day, they climbed up into the bunk above the divan where their grandparents were marveling at the room and comforts of the big trailer. Aggie was already in bed and almost asleep when Learned emerged from the tiny bath stall, his grey streaked hair still wet, after a thorough sudsing, his face pink and clean shaven and his body atingle from the lathering and scrubbing he had given himself. His huge form was incased in a suit of loose-fitting pajamas which his wife had made of red and white striped feed sacks. He extinguished all the lights, except the one above Lillie's and Ruthie's heads; picked up the flashlight and gave the "All clear" signal to Hi, who sat beside Zenobia in the cab of the old hearse—waiting and anxious to get started.

The motor responded like an old, but well-trained horse. Hi backed up with deft accuracy, until the long, four-wheeled trailer was off the abandoned strip of pavement and onto the new highway, then he moved forward slowly, then shifted into high gear and glided along through the early evening darkness at a speed which never exceeded forty miles per hour; and down to ten miles per hour while going up hill.

By the dim rays of the dash light, Hi's two big toes, pro-

truding from the holes in the old shoes, stood out like a proverbial sore thumb. Zenobia looked at them; then, as her eyes traveled up the wide legs of the overalls and to the tightly buttoned denim jacket, and to the alert face of her partner as he kept his eyes on the winding roadway, she said:

"Hi, in the morning, when we get to a town, or a store where they sell shoes, I'm going to buy a brand new pair of shoes for you!"

After clearing a sharp curve, Hi replied: "Oh no! Thanks just the same for the offer; but I can't let you do that—we're not in California yet; not by several hundred miles, a lot of steep hills and any number of unforeseen emergencies! I'm flat broke, I admit; and the Meeks family aren't any too well fixed financially; and you don't possess a fortune, so why should you be wasting money on shoes for me?"

"But Hi! those shoes are-are terrible to look at; and they *must* feel still worse on your feet!"

"Well Honey, I'll admit that they do look a bit—unusual! But honest, I've gotten sort of used to them, and they don't feel so bad. Why I've often wondered why so many women wear shoes with open toes; now I know it is because they are so cool and comfortable! When I get settled in California, I'm going to start a one-man crusade for manufacturers of men's shoes to start making everything from golf shoes to evening shoes with openings in the toes—where a man's tootsies can breathe and wriggle instead of being cramped and sweaty like they've been for centuries! Why the men of Bible times wore sandals; and they did a lot of walking—so why don't the men of today try it? I'm sure they would enjoy such a new freedom!"

"But didn't you say that there was a hole in the sole of one of those shoes? Is that comfortable also?"

"There was a hole clear through to the ground, and it didn't feel a bit good; but I ripped out the tongue and put it over the hole, so now that's fixed and feels o.k."

"Then you won't even accept a loan for the price of a pair of shoes a shirt and a pair of pants?"

"No," Hi replied, as they coasted around an S curve between two hills. "No 'Nobia, I still have my watch; when I get to California, I'll either sell or pawn it for enough money to buy some clothes, or I'll wire Mom to send me a hundred dollars to keep me going until I find a job—only I don't want Mom to know just what a sorry predicament I'm

in, unless I just have to—she worries about me, like mothers do about their absent sons!”

“Have you decided just what you will do when you get to California?” She asked.

“Since it is no longer a matter of what I’d *like* to do but strictly of what I *can* do, I’ll just have to wait and see what the prospects are. When I collected the money for my interest in the filling station and started out; I planned to find a suitable location for a gas station out west; but now that my money has been stolen, I’ll have to think of something else. I suppose the first thing I’ll do will be to try and get a job in some station or garage repair shop. Aw, drat the dad-ratted infernal luck! ’Nobia! I wanted to get started with a bang! I planned to make good on a big, speedy scale so I could ask you to marry me before come other fellow came along and took you away from me! But just look at me! Flat broke, dressed like a tramp and bumming my way to California!”

“No Hi, I don’t even consider you broke—just—well maybe badly bent! You were robbed of several hundred dollars; and that is quite a different thing from spending your last cent—and you’re not bumming your way! You are needed very badly on this trip. You’ve already been a big help in adjusting the motor and in showing Mr. Meeks how impractical it was to be using that gas saving stuff he’d been putting in his motor—and now you’re giving that big, generous man and his family a chance to get some rest, why I’ll bet they are all sleeping soundly and dreaming of orange blossoms and movie stars!”

“But just the same, when I do get a job, and have a few dollars to spare, I’m going to hire two or three taxicabs, or maybe charter a bus and take that whole family for a day’s outing and sightseeing! Gosh! Things have been happening so fast during the past three or four days that I can’t realize that I’m where I am!”

“I feel about the same way Hi! I never dreamed that I would be going to California in a hearse—but I’m happy and thankful to be on my way!”

“Yes,” Hi replied solemnly, “The world can laugh at that man and his big family, and their queer ideas; but they’re honest and I’m mighty proud to have them for my friends!”

The moon shone bright as the somber-hued hearse with the happy young couple in the cab, three sleeping boys in the rear and the trailer loaded with twelve tired and weary sleeping persons in tow, passed in the night. Many passen-

gers in cars they met or who passed the slowly moving affair, strained their eyes to determine what manner of vehicle it was.

Zenobia kept time by patting with the toe of her left foot, as she sang: "I'LL BE THINKING OF YOU!" Hi joined her on the second chorus and the roar of the motor and the squeaking of the body of the heavily loaded hearse made an odd accompaniment; and the gloomy setting of the vehicle, that had carried the remains of so many departed ones to their last resting place, took on an entirely new meaning. What was destined to be its last performance before being junked or retired, was to carry a man and his large family to a promised land, and a beautiful, talented girl and a young ambitious man to new glory in their chosen professions.

Slowly, but sure, the miles sped by. When the big, protruding headlights flashed upon a certain sign post, Zenobia patted Hi's hand, as it rested on the wheel, and exclaimed: "Oh Hi! Now we're in Arizona! Just a few more miles, and we'll be in sunny California! Please, please! old car, don't fail us now!"

"Yes, honey girl! and I hope that everything will be as good, or even better than you expect it to be. Don't worry about this motor; so long as Mr. Meeks or I am driving it, it will get along; and it will get us to the end of our journey with plenty of power to spare!"

"Hi, you're sweet!" Zenobia said softly. "I'm sorry about your misfortune; but as the saying goes: 'Some people's misfortunes are other's gains!' If you hadn't been robbed, you might have missed us somehow, we wouldn't have you with us, instead, we'd probably be stalled on some hill two hundred miles back there, or be drifting along slowly in that cloud of black smoke!"

"The loss of nearly seven hundred dollars and my car, Sylvia, not to mention my clothes, makes it a bit tough for me, but I'll not complain, so long as I am with you. I'll get a new start!" Hi replied confidently, as they rumbled on through the night.

They ate sandwiches and drank a thermos of coffee as they drove along. There was no signal from the trailer, so all must be well inside. They lapsed into meditative silence. Zenobia was thinking of her meeting with the boys in the hospital back in Oklahoma. There were other hospitals elsewhere, in California there must be many of them, where hundreds, yes thousands of men and boys, ranging in ages

from fifty year old veterans of World War I, from the battles of St. Mihiel, Thiaucourt, the Muse, from Vignelles to Chateau-Thierry. Then there were the men of Hi's age who had been maimed, blinded and ravaged with disease from an even worse struggle of the world's armed forces, known as World War II—which claimed victims during the Battle of The Bulge, Italian campaign, the loss and recapture of the Philippines, Wake, Guam and all the other little islands of the Pacific, which cost so much in spilled American blood. A shudder ran up her spine as she thought of a new specter of death—yes, she had read about seventeen year old boys being killed in far away Korea! There must be many of these young lads in the hospitals on the West Coast.

Martin Lawrence had told her how the boys, both old and young, enjoyed hearing a pretty girl sing; and she was very thankful that nature had endowed her with a generous portion of attractive features as well as a clear, pleasing voice and a determination to use that voice. She solemnly pledged that she would use her talent to a great extent in bringing happiness to those who had given so much to insure her freedom and to others like her. This new ambition to entertain the service men and women was creeping up close behind the one she had long cherished—to become a professional singer; but they were vitally connected and when she became well known as a singer, she would be in more demand at the hospitals.

While Zenobia was charting a course for herself as a singer, Hi was conjuring some plans and schemes of his own. Soon after crossing into Arizona, he noticed several signs and posters beside the highway, which announced a golf tournament to be held near Winslow. Since golf was his hobby, he was curious about the games to be played. Darkness had begun to disappear and a gray mist, then a rosy tinge of light appeared as they stopped at a small wayside gas station to get gas, oil and water for the old car. Hi got out and he and the station operator engaged in a battle of questions which almost amounted to senseless double-talk. As the attendant pumped ten gallons of gasoline, his eyes roving from the old hearse to the trailer, he remarked:

"That's an odd looking car—did you have it designed especially for you?"

"Know anything about golf?—the car has a long history!"

"I like Sneed and Mangrum—What year was this car built?"

"Who's playing in this tournament at Winslow?—I don't remember the year!"

"Some Englishman; don't remember his name!—Did you have the trailer built also?"

"Yep! Special job!—How many amateur matches?"

"I don't—two, maybe three or four—Do you use the trailer to live in or is it an office?"

"Both!—Have you ever played any golf?"

"No, I just read about other's who do!—How far are you going?"

"As far as I can!—What kind of a course is this Winslow green?"

"Oh just a golf course—grass, sand hills!—Are you just a tourist or maybe a professional?"

"Well fellow, I'll let you in on a little secret! This is all a publicity stunt—my clothes, this er, unique car, the big trailer! Everything has a purpose; but shu-s-sh! don't speak so loud! My assistants are asleep in the trailer and must not be awakened! Here's your change; so long, we'll have to be on our way to meet an important appointment later in the day!"

Hi climbed into the cab and drove on before any of the Meeks family awakened and rushed out in full force or before the fellow who manned the gas pump thought to ask his name.

"Why Hi! What a line you handed that man!" Zenobia scolded; and grinning sheepishly, he replied:

"Oh well! His mother should have taught him not to ask strangers so many questions!"

He turned off the main highway and followed the belt route which skirted the city limits. At the West side of town they came to the golf course. The early morning sun shown on a huge poster; and wanting to read the poster in full, Hi stopped the car and got out and walked over to the sign board, just as the Meeks family began to awaken and turn the blinds so they could see out. Asa opened the door of the rear compartment and asked if breakfast was ready. Learned slipped into his overalls and blue shirt and, without hat or shoes, appeared to ask Hi if the car was acting up again. Zenobia assured the boy that they would eat breakfast very soon, and Mr. Meeks that the car was running beautifully; then explained why Hi had stopped—to read the golf tournament poster.

"Never could see what fun s' many folks git out'n chasin' a ball all over th' country side with a bundle o' silly lookin'

sticks! Why I could have a heap better time a diggin' a mole out'n th' garden with a mattock!" Learned remarked; then nobbled back to the trailer to finish dressing.

In a few moments Hi returned with a quick step and a strange gleam in his eyes; and as he paused as if undecided as to what he should do, Zenobia suggested that this would be an ideal time and place to have breakfast.

Hi readily agreed; and they went back to the house trailer where night clothes were being tossed aside and shirts, pants and petticoats and dresses put on. She and Hi began preparing breakfast; and soon the big group were seated before a stack of hot cakes, ham, eggs and lots of syrup. Hi was absent minded throughout the meal; finally Zenobia asked:

"Hi, why the faraway look in your eyes? What's on your mind?"

"That golf tournament—it's a cinch! Three amateurs and a pro that are duck-soup for someone!—Gee I wish—Oh confound the luck! I wish I could get my hands on the thief who stole my clothes and golf clubs!"

Zenobia eyed him as a prosecuting attorney eyes a defendant; and was not surprised when, breakfast over and Learned was preparing to drive, said:

"Much a'bliged Mr. Hi, fer drivin' all night! I slept like a log! Now Miss Zenobia an' you better git some rest!"

"No-o!" Hi replied, as he looked at Meeks then at Zenobia, then at the poster beside the big iron gate, "No. Mr. Meeks, if you think you can manage the car the rest of the way, and if you would be willing to trust me with your clothes, until I can repay you, I believe I will remain here—I'd like to get into that game!"

"Hi! you can't be serious!" Zenobia exclaimed, even if she did know perfectly well that Hi's mind was made up and she doubted if anything she or anyone else might say, could change it.

"Never more serious in my whole life! I've seen Maj. Plunkett play; and I know what it takes to beat him; besides, I certainly could use that five hundred dollars prize money!"

"Shore, I kin manage th' Cad-lak—since ye showed me th' folly o' usin' thet gas savin' stuff; but suit yer'self 'bout goin' er stayin' 'cause ye're welcome t' come along—mighty glad t' have ye; but ef'n ye think ye should o'rter stay here an' take part in thet game, why thet's yer own biz'ness!" Learned assured the serious faced young man.

"Thanks Mr. Meeks—for everything! When I get to Cali-

fornia, I'm going to buy you a brand new, Sunday-go-to-meeting suit, hat, shoes, shirt, tie—everything that you can wear at once to dress up in; in appreciation for you having so generously loaned your clothes to me when I needed them so badly!"

"Shucks! T'wasn't nothin'! As I all'ays says, I try t' share m' worldly goods with m' fellowman!"

"In the meantime, what are you going to do for clothes to wear and clothes to play that golf match with?" Zenobia wanted to know.

"Oh, I'll make out! I'm not as particular about either as some players are! I have an idea!" Hi responded confidentially.

"Well, I hope that this idea of yours proves to be a better one than the one where you want to sleep and let someone rob you of everything except your upper plates! I suppose you expect to win a small fortune, then fly to California and meet me with a brass band!"

Ignoring her cattish remark, Hi continued:

"I wish you could see me play; but Mr. Meeks doesn't care for golf; and you are all anxious to be on your way, so don't let me detain you!"

"Didn't ye say that ye waz broke?" Learned asked.

"Yes I am—but not for long!" Hi replied confidentially.

"Jes' th' same young man, never let it be said that Learned Meeks ever left a fr'en flat broke an' in a strange place an' among strangers, so's long's I have a few dollars in m' pocket!" said the big, generous man, as he pulled a flabby and much worn leather purse—the kind with compartments which closed with ball-tipped, twisted catches, from his faded jeans pocket. With a big thumb and forefinger, he twisted the catch open and removed a closely folded and frayed five dollar bill and forced it into Hi's unwilling hand.

Hi grasped the generous hand of his friend in a firm clasp of friendship that made the broad face of Learned Meeks beam with pride and gladness, as he said: "Thanks Mr. Meeks! I'm going to repay you this money with one hundred per cent interest! So long my friend—I'll see you very soon!"

Gramp and Granny were anxious to be on their way; and they considered it only a silly whim of modern youth, for Hi to even think of remaining behind just to play that outlandish game; and Gramp said: "Now son, yer old 'nuf t' know what ye be doin'; but Utopia an' me don't hanker t' tarry here—we get several more flings t'be flung; an' Callie-

tornie is th' place whar' th' flinging's t' be done!"

Hi bid the old couple goodbye, then called a collective "So long" to the Meeks children, who were clamoring for action and not at all interested in anything that the brightly illustrated billboard had to offer. Learned and his wife and the four small children were in the cab, the boys settled in the rear of the hearse and the others were inside the trailer, while Zenobia lingered beside Hi. Disappointed and a bit miffed at his sudden and seemingly unwise decision, she made a last desperate attempt to assist him.

"Hi, if you're determined to stay, why don't you let me loan you enough money with which to buy some decent clothes and a set of clubs? You'll look ridiculous, running around out there on the golf course dressed in those clothes—and with no equipment to play."

"Thanks Honey! But the plan I have in mind, doesn't call for regulation attire, or even one club—I'm going to be "Clown For A Day!" and beg, borrow or even steal a set of clubs to win that match with! They're ready and waiting for you—Take care of yourself 'Nobia, my sweet! The next time you see me, I won't look like this—I promise you!"

"So long Hi! I—I wish you luck!" Zenobia said in sulky tones, then ran into the trailer, closed and locked the door.

C h a p t e r T e n

CLOWN FOR A DAY

FOR THE SECOND time in less than a week, Hiram Hills stood beside the road and watched the big house trailer glide away with Zenobia watching from the rear window. On the first occasion, she had smiled and waved to him; but this time there was a decided pout on her pretty face; until, determined to make her smile, he suddenly bowed his back, with chest thrust forward, and hips twitching, he began to do an imitation of the "Darby Dance". He was gratified to see the pouting lips broaden into a smile—then Zenobia threw a kiss to him as the trailer passed out of sight.

Armed with plenty of determination and a generous knowledge of the technique of the game of golf, Hi, dressed in the billowing blue garments, and ragged shoes—and smiling boyishly at the thought of seeing Zenobia again soon, turned and entered the big gates, through which many a pro-

fessional had passed, and walked boldly to the clubhouse and up to the superintendent who sat behind a small desk in a well-appointed office. The man looked at the stranger; and was about to order him off the premises, when Hi said, in English and cultured tones that surprised the man in charge:

"Good morning Sir! Where could I find the other amateurs and Maj. Plunkett?"

"The *other*—Maj. Pl—! What is your name? Would you kindly sign this register?" The befuddled man looked at Hi with criticism, perplexity and uncertainty written all over his flushed face.

Hi grasped the pen and was about to affix the name "Hiram Hills" to the page in the big book, when an ad in a magazine which lay on the desk caught his eyes and gave him a sudden inspiration. The line "Natures, spelled backwards" offered a daring and subtle mysticism to the plans in his agile mind. With a firm hand, he signed the two unusual, and oddly spelled names, Marih Sllih to the book with the same casual ease that a fifty year old payroll clerk uses in signing the weekly checks for hundreds of workers.

"And what is your address Mr.—er—S-s—"

"Sllih—pronounced Sli—Marih Sli," Hi prompted obligingly. My address is of no importance right now—since I'm so far from home! Just put it at this golf course for the time being!"

"And your—your clothes—your golf bag?" the man said, his eyes roving from head to toe of Hi's comical clothes. He was becoming more bewildered with every moment spent in the presence of this odd-looking individual who had a name that sounded like the term of some germ that scientists had discovered.

"My game today is for charity—a very worthy cause, I assure you. I'm wearing these clothes to distinguish myself from the ordinary players. Since my golf bag was recently stolen while crossing the continent, I'm going to borrow some equipment from a charitable-minded person, with which to win that contest with the Major!"

"Oh, I see! Well, I must say, this is all a bit unusual! But then—hum-m! I wonder if—Oh well, we'll see what we can do!" the man mumbled; then stepping to the rear door, he called: "Hey Sandy! Come here a minute if you aren't too busy!"

There was a sound of heavy footsteps on the gravel walk; then a short stocky man with a fringe of reddish brown hair

around the bald spot which covered the upper area of his head, responded to the name Sandy and, with pruning shears in one hand, appeared at the rear door and answered:

"Yes, Mr. Ware; an' what can I be doin' fer ye this fine mornin'?" Then seeing the strange looking form of Hi standing in the middle of the room, the husky Irishman suspected that here was an intruder whom the superintendent wished to have evicted. Sandy placed the pruning shears on a nearby filing cabinet and knotted the muscles of his arms, squared his shoulders, and with the look of a charging bull in his eyes, he was advancing across the room when Mr. Ware's next words stopped him in his tracks, causing his shoulders to sag and his muscles to go limp:

"Sandy," he heard Mr. Ware saying, "This is Mr. Sli—a distinguished visitor who is entering the game for Charity's sake and—"

"May th' Saints preserve us!" Sandy muttered, and Mr. Ware continued: "Mr. Sli had the extreme misfortune to have his golf equipment stolen; therefore, it is necessary for him to play with borrowed clubs. Will you go to the locker room and get Mr. Manley Pritchard's outfit? Here are the keys?"

"Sure an' I'll do that very thing. Ye don't think Mr. Pritchards would object, now do ye?"

"I'm sure that he would be most happy to loan them to this gentleman; if he were here; and since he is in Europe, I'll take the responsibility of allowing Mr. Sli to use them, in order that he may participate in this contest."

"Thanks Mr. Ware! I'll be as careful with them as I would be with my own; and should they be damaged in any way, I'll pay for it in full," Hi said, happy with his adventure and growing more optimistic every moment.

In a very short time, Sandy returned with the expensive bag and fittings belonging to Mr. Manley Pritchards. Hi's eyes gleamed as he removed several of the beautiful clubs, struck a professional stance and took several swings at imaginary tees. Even the skeptical Sandy was convinced that here indeed, was a professional in disguise. When Mr. Ware explained to Sandy the fact that Mr. Sli was to play for charity, and suggested that they give him all the cooperation they could, Sandy ran his hand over the straggly red rim of hair and asked:

"An' now just what sort o' charity might ye be a playin' fer Mr.—eh, Sli?"

Hi cleared his throat, looked rather annoyed at the question, and replied:

"In all my dealings and donations with charity and philanthropic subjects, I adhere strictly to the Biblical quotation: "Let not thy left hand knoweth what thy right hand doeth!"

"Aw an' sure now ye're a mon after me own heart!" the smiling descendant of the Emerald Isle exclaimed, "An' what's more, ye can d'pend on old Sandy t' back ye up one hundred percent! Now that ye've got yer clubs an' ever'-thing, won't ye be needin' a good caddy?"

"Yes Sandy, a good caddy would be a big help, but—"

"Nough said man! I've got a husky nephew what's as charitable minded as his ol' uncle; an' he'll be with ye when th' game starts!"

"Gee!" Hi exclaimed. "Never, in all the games of golf that I've played throughout the breadth of the land, have I encountered such friendliness and cooperation as you folks offer!"

"We always try to be helpful; and I'll be especially happy to be of any help to you Mr. Sli!" the beaming Mr. Ware promised.

"An' that goes fer me!" Sandy said, then added: "I'll phone my nephew Larry, then I'll show ye around a bit if ye'd like. This is yer first visit to this course ain't it?"

"Yes, I've read a lot about the games that have been played here; but this is my first visit to this course. I would like to look the place over a bit before the games start."

Sandy picked up the telephone and dialed a number. When someone finally answered, he said into the transmitter: "Hello Kathleen! this is yer brother Sandy. Where is Larry? He's still in bed?—well get him up and tell him t' eat a good breakfast, then report at the golf course at once!—Yes he is to caddy for Mr. Sli—No, not *Why*—Sli! No Kathleen, not sty!—it's S-l-i!—Never mind the gentleman's name! Just tell Larry to find me an' I'll tell him all about it!—And Kathleen—tell that son of your'n that this ain't no ordinary game; and that he doesn't need to expect big wages or fancy tips!—no—no, this game is bein' played for Charity; an' never let it be said that anybody is more charitable minded than me an' my sister Kathleen an' her son Larry!—Now hurry an' get th' lad up an' send him over—Goodbye!"

Sandy clicked the receiver upon the hook, and picking up the big golf bag which belonged to the absent Mr. Pritchards, he led the way around the course and proudly pointed

out the beauties, the unusual handicaps, and hazards, and the desirable qualities of the greensward which he helped to keep in tip-top condition in exchange for a comfortable, though not luxurious living. Hi was more than pleased with the location, and the advantages he saw. He was growing more optimistic at every step about the green, rolling hills and the gently sloping valley.

While Hi was engaged in the reconnoitering turn about the course, Mr. Ware, the superintendent, was busy at the telephone. He made call after call—first to the local newspapers, then to every golf-minded person he could recall, who lived in the immediate vicinity.

By the time Hi and Sandy had returned, a crowd of spectators had gathered and others were coming through the gates; and Larry, a tall, lanky youth of fourteen, with protruding upper teeth and curious blue eyes set in a freckled face beneath a mop of pale blonde hair, was waiting. He acknowledged his uncle's introduction to Hi with a toothy grin and a flat "Howdy" and with curiosity written all over his face, he took the golf bag and listened respectfully to his uncle's orders.

Mr. Ware introduced the mysterious Mr. Sli to the crowd, in much the same fashion that a toastmaster introduces a distinguished speaker of the evening at a banquet in the Waldorf Astoria. When some of the local golf fans learned that the stranger in the baggy overalls and broken shoes, had challenged the amateurs and Maj. Plunkett, there were many scrutinous stares in an effort to pierce the obvious disguise and to recall who the man was, or where, if ever, they had seen him. One old fellow, who could not play on account of a wrenched knee, mumbled:

"Now *this* I want to see!" A sports reporter from a local paper, stepped up to Hi's side and asked:

"Mr. Is this your best golf garb?"

"This is my 'special'—er—costume—I'm always lucky when I wear this! I realize that I must look funny; in fact, I *feel* funny! And that's exactly what we want—everybody happy and laughing!"

Hi was still laughing at his clever reply, when a young lady, with a mass of bushy curls about her tanned face, and dressed in a bright green sweater, a green plaid shirt and white golf shoes, stopped before Hi and stood looking at his shoes a moment, then asked:

"Aren't those shoes rather uncomfortable? Don't you stub your toes quite often?"

"No Miss, I don't worry about my toes—it's the hole in this sole that gives me the most trouble! But they have a good-luck omen attached to them. This hole is almost as big as a silver dollar! See?" Hi said as he stooped over, lifted one foot and plucked the ragged shoe from his foot and, holding the leather tongue he had placed over the hole, in his hand, he peeked through the gaping hole in the sole as one focussing a candid camera on the group of curious people about him.

The young lady in the green sweater and plaid skirt, tossed her head to shake the mass of curls from her forehead, looked at the shoe for a moment, then smiling back at Hi, she took an object from the tiny pocket on the bright skirt, and, taking the old shoe from Hi's hand, she fitted the bright round object over the hole on the inside of the shoe and said: "There Mr. Sli, I want you to wear my good-luck silver dollar in your shoe while you play today! I'll not be playing; so I'll not need it!"

"Oh gee, thanks Miss! That feels like a million dollars in that shoe!" Hi replied, as he replaced the shoe on his foot; and stood with the silver disc, topped by the leather tongue, between the sole of his foot and the ground.

Another well-wisher tossed a shiny new quarter into Hi's borrowed golf bag—just for more good luck. Still another fellow, who was looking forward to watching a good game, and enjoyed the antics of the clown, noticed Hi's hair being blown over his eyes by the stiff breeze. Removing the black and white checkered golf cap from his own head, he placed it on Hi's head and said: "There, that will not only keep your hair and the bright sun out of your eyes, but will also add the finishing touch to your costume!"

Hi smiled, thanked the man, then raked his hair back with his fingers and placed the cap back on his head—with the visor hanging over the back of his neck! Then he removed the faded blue denim jumper, which Learned Meeks had loaned him, and folded it as carefully as if it had been made of broadcloth, and told Larry, his grinning caddy, to take good care of it; then he unbuttoned the cuffs in the home-made blue chambray shirt he wore, rolled the cuffs up two turns and stooped over and added two more turns to the cuffs of the bulging overalls—which placed the bottoms of them just below his knees, leaving at least twelve inches of naked, hairy shins between the bottoms of the trousers and the tops of the ragged shoes—which made him appear even more the part of the clown that he had decided to act.

Upon seeing the expensive wristwatch he wore, the only outward indication that he possessed anything of any value, there was mixed reaction among the curious crowd—which was growing bigger and more interested at every moment. A few thought the stranger was some famous person in disguise; but no one could guess who he might be. Some believed that this was strictly a publicity gag; and expected the fellow to emerge with something to sell or some glib sales talk for some product, when the psychological moment arrived. One individual, who remained close to his wife and mother-in-law, on the fringe of the crowd, suspected that Hi was either a pick-pocket, a con man or a fake stock salesman—or all three combined. He cautioned his family to watch out for their watches and pocketbooks and *not* to buy anything the fellow had to offer.

As though reading the skeptic's mind, Hi looked over the crowd and warned in a mysterious voice: "Now folks, you better pin your pocketbooks inside your undies with a big strong safety pin, and put a lock on your watches—and hold the key in your mouths, I could be a crook, you know! But of course I'm not; but since there might be actual crooks of different kinds in our midst, you might as well be protected against what ever I might be, so nobody can get the best of you!"

Jokes and wise-cracks began flying; and bets were being made.

Hi bet Learned's overalls against five dollars that he would win from Maj. Plunkett—then the blue shirt against two dollars, and finally the old shoes against ten dollars; then he glanced around the crowd and asked: "Do any of you happen to have an old barrel, with both ends out, that you don't need?"

"I've got an old gunny sack in my car, that you can use for a sarong!" one fellow offered.

"Gee! and to think that I *would* leave my plaid blanket in Zenobia's trailer!" Hi thought, "Oh well, if I don't win this game, I'll never see her again! I might as well run for the tall timber and become a hermit!"

A business man from Winslow who was an admirer of Maj. Plunkett, offered to bet one hundred dollars against Hi's watch that the Major would win.

"Well, a hermit hasn't much use for a wristwatch!" Hi thought, then he said: "I'll take your bet Mister; one hundred dollars will be a good sum to so worthy a cause!"

A photographer was busy snapping Hi from various an-

gles; and appreciating the value of the rare pictures he was getting and speculating what he might receive from them from various publications, handed a ten dollar bill to Hi, with the encouraging suggestion: "Here fellow, is ten dollars, you can either keep it to buy some new overalls or bet it on yourself!"

Hi waved the greenback in the air and yelled: "Anyone here who is foolish enough to bet me ten to one that I won't be the winner?"

The challenge was accepted by a professional gambler who plied his trade at numerous sports gatherings, especially golf. The crowd that had gathered around the queer looking man who stood near the first tee, exchanging quips, wise-cracks and questions with them, suddenly parted to make room for the pompous Maj. Plunkett to make a much heralded appearance. A visitor who hoped to carry the laurels of victory back to jolly old England with him. The tall slender man, with slightly grey hair, and dressed in immaculate golf clothes of gray plaid coat and trousers, blue cap and shirt and followed by a nattily attired lad who carried an expensive golf bag with the Plunkett family crest emblazoned on one side, was a bit mystified and obviously perturbed when he discovered that so much attention was being bestowed upon the odd looking stranger. When he learned that he, the great Percy Plunkett of England, had been challenged by the outlandish appearing individual, he exclaimed: "Oh, but I say! Isn't this a bit extraordinary!—But then you Americans are an unpredictable lot of people—Oh my yes! you really are!"

Hi was careful to use correct English; and yet not to be too precise—so his opponent might suspect that he was mimicking him; and this seemed to further confuse and disquiet the man from the British Isles. Then the manner in which Hi began telling jokes to the men, aroused his attention; for he prided himself on being one of the best, between strokes, joke tellers who ever followed the ball. He cocked his ear in order to catch every word that Hi spoke; and discovered that this ragged stranger was producing some entirely new ones and rearranging others to sound much more amusing that the manner in which he had been telling them.

Hi watched the results, took his cue and kept almost out of earshot of the tall gentleman while he told several "traveling salesman" jokes to the men. A few of the yarns were not exactly suitable to tell to a mixed audience; but us-

ually a husband would hear the story, then call his wife aside and repeat it to her, she would, in turn, tell it to every female that she encountered, until there were groups of excited, giggling and blushing women all along the course.

When Maj. Plunkett told a story, Hi would top it with one of a similar nature, or of a different, and fresher version until the Maj. became desperate and began to search his vast memory for a choice tid-bit that he might have heard in his exclusive club in London. Hi's caddy tried to offer a few helpful suggestions; and the crowd saw what effect the lack of being able to out talk the stranger, was having on the Major's poise and self confidence.

A number of "Charity" clubs were being formed among the spectators—the loser being required to toss a dime, quarter, half dollar or a dollar into Hi's golf bag. At the end of the amateur match; which Hi won with ease, there were several dollars in silver coins, in the borrowed bag.

When it came time for the match between the Major and Hi, with the five hundred dollars prize at stake, the Major was so preoccupied with his jokes and stories, and so abashed at being seen playing with such a "silly ass", that he strode about blustering and mumbling. When Hi asked him confidentially if he knew what the young lady on the train told the traveling salesman, Maj. Plunkett paused a moment, tried to remember where, and if, he had heard the question before; and being unable to guess the correct reply, he stammered:

"Why no-er-why I suppose she told the blighter to mind his own business!" And when it became apparent that Hi was going to accept the answer without further clarification, he asked: "By the way, old fellow! just w'at *did* the young lady say?"

Hi whispered the correct answer into the Major's eager ear. There was a strained silence, a blank look of failure to get the point spread over the aristocratic face—then a gleam of light began to lighten his eyes. A rumble of chuckles sounded deep down in his diaphragm; which was soon followed by a burst of uncontrolled laughter. Slapping Hi on the back, he exclaimed: "Haw, haw! She said—Oh, ho, ho! I say old chap, that was a-a—as you Americans say, a lu lu!" He continued to chuckle throughout the game; and came in a poor second.

Regardless of his loss, the Major was in high spirits; and a very jovial and good losing sportsman, though as Hi accepted the five hundred dollars and proceeded to collect

an additional three hundred an sixty-five dollars in side bets and contributions. The man from England extended a cordial invitation to Hi asking him to look him up if he ever visited good old London.

Hi removed the good-luck piece of silver from his shoe; and adding another similar coin to it, he returned it to the young lady who had loaned it to him, with a broad grin, he said: "Here miss, is your good luck coin and one of my own—I want you to keep mine; and may it bring as much luck to you as your's brought to me!"

Then he slipped a ten dollar bill into Larry's eager fist, returned the undamaged clubs to the elated Sandy, and retired to the shower room where he telephoned for a taxi to come at once to the golf course. After taking a refreshing bath, he slipped into the tattered clothes and emerged smiling and as enigmatic as when he had appeared at the superintendant's desk. He disappeared just as mysteriously.

The taxi driver, keeping a watchful eye on the strange character on the rear seat, whisked Hi to town where he got into a first class clothing store just a few seconds before closing time. He purchased a stylish light grey suit, a snappy brimmed hat, a pair of expensive black shoes, socks, underwear, tie and a half dozen handkerchiefs. He emerged from the store, dressed in the new clothes, carrying a small suitcase in which was a change of underwear, shirt, and the broken down shoes which he took along "just for luck".

Having noticed the suspicion with which the clothing salesman regarded him and seeing another sales man carry on an excited whispered conversation over the telephone, Hi was not surprised when he stepped from the door of the store, which was banged shut after him, to see two uniformed policemen who were pretending they happened to meet a few feet from the store. Further along the street, he noticed three unmistakable figures of plainclothes sleuths sauntering aimlessly along with their right hands near the bulge under their left arms. Hi wasn't alarmed at the sight of the officers; on the contrary, he was pleased to see them, for he suddenly remembered that there was a matter of a stolen car, a sum of money and an entire outfit of wearing apparel which demanded a lot of reporting—if he ever hoped to recover any portion of it. With a smile on his face, he walked straight up to the two uniformed members of the law, just as they "happened" to meet and were exchanging commonplace remarks, while keeping an alert eye on their suspected "man".

"Hello Officers! I'm glad you're here, for I want you to be on the lookout for a car that was stolen from me!"

"Yes?" one of the officers replied, "Suppose you give us a description of your car, so we will know what we're supposed to be looking for!"

"O.K. Officer, but since I have a train to catch, and I want to get something to eat first, suppose you call your plain clothes buddies who are sauntering along there, so they can hear the story at the same time. That will save a lot of time for all of us!"

The officers blushed at being detected in their scheme to catch a desperado; and after exchanging a few feeble protests at not having any assistants, they signalled the three men, who appeared with inquisitiveness and suddenness to form a ring around Hi. He began by telling his real name, where he was born, his mother's address, how long he was in the Navy, how long he operated the service station on Highway 66, of his meeting with Zenobia Starr and of having set out to follow or join her in California. He told them about Sylvia, how he happened to name the car; and what it looked like—to him at least. He explained about the motor trouble, of learning that the girl had received a hitch and how he had gone to sleep—to awaken to find himself with nothing but a suit of underwear, a blanket, an army cot and his watch in his possession.

The graphic account of his efforts and final success in getting someone to give him a lift while he was wearing the plaid blanket was interrupted at different points of his story, by first one then another of the five interested listeners and asked to clear up a point that they did not quite understand. He finally explained about overtaking Zenobia, who had been ditched with her big trailer, along the way; and of reading the notices about the golf match, of his participation in the game.

One of the officers, disclosed the fact that a taxi driver had reported having hauled a suspicious looking character from the golf course only a few minutes before the salesman in the clothing store had phoned to report an obvious bum who was purchasing expensive clothing and paying cash for it. Hi gave them the number of Sylvia's license, her make and combined colors and the original date she was made; and to the officers astonishment, he gave them the number of his driver's license—which had been stolen along with the car and clothes and the index number of his finger-

print files which had been taken while in the navy and upon applying for an operator's license after he got out.

The five members of the law were filling several pages of note books with data as he gave it to them, then when he had finished, he asked if he could be of any more help before he ate some dinner then caught the train for California where he was to meet Zenobia and to try to find work. The five men paused in their scribbling and looked at each other; then they agreed that Hi had given a very good account of himself, promised to be on the lookout for Sylvia and wished him luck.

Having eaten nothing since breakfast when Zenobia had plied him with hotcakes, ham and eggs, he was almost famished; so he whiled away almost an hour eating a hearty dinner and waited for the West bound train.

It was nine thirty when the porter made up his berth and a very happy, though tired, Hi stretched out between the smooth sheets and lay thinking and planning. His only anxiety was concerning Zenobia's welfare. He felt confident that the Meeks family would never desert her; no matter what kind of trouble they might encounter. It was also satisfying for him to realize that the big family from Piney needed Zenobia as badly as she needed them. He breathed a fervent prayer that the motor in the old hearse would keep running until they had at least reached the California State line.

He smiled when he thought of how ridiculous he must have looked plodding about the golf course in that outlandish attire—"Wish I had a picture of myself; so I could show it to mine and Zenobia's grandchildren!" he mused to himself, as the train wheels began sounding like a lullaby as they clicked over the smooth rails. Recalling some of the stories and jokes that he had heard on the course, made him chuckle out loud—then the next minute he would groan: "Oh, if I could only get my hands on the thief that stole my Sylvia!" The memory of another joke would then crowd all thoughts of the scrapped-up little roadster from his mind and he fell asleep smiling at the way Maj. Plunkett looked when he finally grasped the point of one of the jokes he had told him moments before.

He dreamed of returning to the golf course where he had recently scored so well; and he was driving Sylvia with Zenobia seated beside him. As he drove from shot to shot in the little car, he not only made Sylvia shimmy and rhumba, but she also kicked up her rear wheels, reared her front

wheels and bucked like Gene Autry's horse, Champion!

As the first rays of sunshine began to stab through the narrow slit beneath the Pullman window shade, Hi awoke with a start. He wondered if the train was near Los Angeles; and raising the shade a bit, he looked out, and though no signs or anything was in sight, he was sure that he was in California. He hastily scrambled into his clothes and started for the washroom when he met the porter and asked the familiar and simple question:

"We're in California aren't we? Are we near Los Angeles?"

"No Suh! We is still in Arizona; but we will be crossin' de line in 'bout half an hou'ah!"

Hi washed, tied his necktie and answered the first call for breakfast. Feeling the need for some fresh air, he went to the observation car for a smoke and perhaps a chat with other passengers. Although it had been less than forty-eight hours, it seemed to him that he had spent a good portion of his life wearing the ugly plaid blanket or the ill-fitting clothes that Learned Meeks had loaned him—both of which had practically ostracized him from those whom he would liked to have known better.

Most of the chairs on the little platform at the end of the rear car were occupied. As Hi slid into a seat beside a friendly man of his own age, he was reminded of a joke. This one caused a burst of laughter from the five men and three women who were enjoying the brisk, early morning air. Other stories, mostly those about odd happenings in strange places followed. Everyone was in a happy and friendly mood. The snowcapped mountains in the distance seemed very close to the speeding train; which now ran parallel, and quite close to a highway. The few cars and trucks appeared as only big ants or other insects as they crawled along the road in this lonely desert region, where only sand dunes, distant hills and scattered vegetation of the straggly, arid variety appeared.

He was debating with himself, whether he should tell a certain tall story that had just entered his mind, when a lady who was sitting near him, exclaimed, as she pointed in the direction of the highway:

"Oh look! Look at that funny car!" Everyone did look in the direction the girl was pointing; and a man remarked:

"Well, of all the junk-heaps on wheels—*that* takes the prize!"

Hi suddenly became speechless. The tall story was com-

pletely forgotten. He gazed spellbound, his eyes never blinked, as he watched the tiny car scurrying along over the smooth pavement as if trying to outrun the locomotive. Suddenly he startled the other passengers by shouting in the direction of the highway:

"Sylvia! Oh Sylvia! I thought I had lost you forever!—Let me off this train!" He set one foot upon the railing; but the man next to him grasped his arm and pulled him back as he cautioned:

"There, there, fellow! Take it easy—why you'd be dashed to pieces if you jumped off this train now! Just sit down and wait till we get to the next station, then get off the right way!"

The three women looked frantically at each other and the men sadly shook their heads, as Hi wailed:

"That's my Sylvia! Those dirty crooks stole her from me!"

"Too bad! But now that she's headed the same direction as you are, it won't be so difficult for you to trace her!" one man consoled; and the young man next to Hi asked:

"Is Sylvia your wife?"

"No, she's my car" Hi answered, as the three women and one man arose quickly and hustled inside the coach. The railroad suddenly veered to the left and the little car on the highway was hidden from Hi's frantic gaze. The stranger at his side tried to get him to go inside and rest; but he refused. He kept hoping that the railroad and the highway would again run close enough together so he could see his car Sylvia. In the meantime, he kept trying to tell those who remained on the platform that someone had stolen his car, money and clothes while he slept. He gave them a vivid description of how he awoke, had nothing to wear except two small pieces of underwear, a pair of old shoes and a plaid blanket; of how he must have looked like Chief Mud-in-the-face as he ran along the highway. His disjointed and fanciful story mentioned a family of fifteen, a beautiful girl who sang like an Angel, a hearse, a wild dash about a golf course which ended with the pathetic words:

"I know the old hearse will get Zenobia home all right; and now I've actually seen my Sylvia—and she's headed west!"

Not one of the listeners believed even a shred of his story. Some thought he was another war tragedy, others suspected that he was either drunk or doped. The man beside him happened to remember that just before he had

seen the apparition on the highway, Hi had mentioned an accident he had while in the Navy, when a bomb that had been overlooked, exploded on the deck killing four men and wounding several more.

This man, who was also an ex-Navy man had recognized many Navy terms and descriptions as authentic. He was convinced that the owner of Sylvia was suffering from shell shock and he remained at his side while the others slipped away one by one. He tried to keep a conversation going; first about life on Uncle Sam's ships and discovered that Hi's knowledge of many plans of ships, duties of various men aboard ship and certain happenings of the past war were accurate in every detail. Somehow, he managed to steer the topic of conversation to bicycles, motor scooters, jeeps, modern cars and finally to the latest designs in hearses. To his amazement Hi replied whimsically: "That old hearse that Meeks drove was the best I've ever seen—even if it does throw off a cloud of smoke as black as the day of doom!"

The startled young man who had assumed a protective guardianship over Hi, watched his companion from the corner of his eye to see if he could detect any other signs of lunacy; and he quickly changed the conversation from hearses to golf courses. Hi responded by telling of the remarkable score he had made when he won the five hundred dollars from Maj. Plunkett. The strange man was becoming convinced that, rare as it was, Hi was telling the truth. Then Hi began describing the attire he had worn—the overalls, broken shoes in which he had placed a silver goodluck coin that had been loaned him by a pretty girl.

"Was this the girl who sings like an Angel?" he asked.

"Oh no!" Hi replied, "Zenobia is the girl who sings like an Angel. She looks like one too, why she looked so pretty riding in that hearse that I could almost close my eyes and imagine that I was in Heaven. If it hadn't been for that black smoke! I—"

"Sure! Sure, I understand!" the man said, laying a friendly hand on Hi's arm and trying to again get his mind off of the hearse that kept bobbing up in their conversation. "I know it must have been wonderful—the girl I mean! I wonder what they'll be serving for lunch on the dining car?"

"The usual thing I suppose—roast beef, chicken or turkey—maybe froglegs!" Hi replied; then looking up at the white clouds which flecked the blue skies and the distant mountain peaks, which recent snows had crowned like so many clown caps, he added: "I hope it doesn't turn too cold—don't know

whether Mr. Meeks would think to put anti-freeze in the radiator. Sure hope the old hearse doesn't freeze up and burst before they get to that Heaven on Earth that they're headed for!"

"That confounded hearse again!" Hi's companion said to himself, "why it's as menacing as the Headless Horseman that Ichabod Crane saw!" To his relief and utter amazement, Hi thought of another story to tell—and it concerned neither hearses, black smoke, weird looking golfers or a girl who sang like an Angel!"

They passed the remainder of the morning without Hi revealing any more eccentric notions; but those who had fled at his first outburst after seeing Sylvia on the highway, told of the incident to others in the various coaches. The story was soon repeated and so enlarged and elaborated upon, that during the remainder of the trip, everyone on the train shied clear of him.

At lunch time, when he happened to sit down at a table for four, where two women who were half way through their combined late breakfast and early lunch, they exchanged glances, nodded to each other, then laid down their forks, snatched up their purses, fled to the safety of their compartment and locked the door behind them. Hi looked after the retreating women in a puzzled manner; then he glanced at other diners—and saw eyes lowered and conversations cease abruptly. He was sure that they were discussing him; but he was at a total loss as to the reason why! The colored waiters had been informed by the porters, of the strange man aboard the train; and they were half scared out of their collective wits—and looked it! One of the waiters ventured cautiously up to Hi's table and, wide-eyed, waited for his order, then snatched up the slip of paper and scampered to the tiny kitchen, where he boasted to the cook and his two helpers that he had talked to "Dat crazy fellow!"

Hi had an uneasy feeling that everyone on the train was afraid of him. He looked about for a friendly glance—but heads were turned or eyes shifted. The young lad who had sat near him on the observation platform was nowhere to be seen. He longed for someone to talk to while he ate—conversation made the time pass faster; and the quicker he got to Los Angeles and Zenobia the better it would suit him. He tried to think whether he had said or done anything that would offend anyone—the stories and jokes he had told while on the observation car were all carefully selected ones

—he had been careful not to tell any of those that he kept for “special” occasions.

His clothes were ready made, but the best that the shop in Winslow had to offer, and so far as he could see, there was nothing amiss with them. He suddenly felt to make sure that his shirt tail was tucked in properly! To add to his discomfort and bewilderment, he noticed that the waiters quickened their steps as they passed his table. He hurriedly finished his pie, arose and slamming his napkin down in a wad, left the table. He looked carefully at his reflection in a long narrow mirror, but saw nothing wrong with his clothes. Meeting a porter in the long narrow aisle, he asked angrily:

“Say George! What’s the matter with me? Do I look silly or inhuman or—why in tarnation is everyone acting as though I had the smallpox?”

“Yes suh! I mean *no* suh! Yo’all looks all right! Yo’ see mos’ o’ de folks on dis train is jes’ plain crazy!” the porter replied, shaking in his shoes, then dashing away to avoid hearing, or having to say more.

Hi returned to his seat; and intent on getting even with some one for something, he assumed an attitude of aloofness and utter disregard for those about him. He opened a newspaper but only pretended to read; for his mind was occupied with trying to solve the riddle which surrounded him like an enclosing wall. Feeling that there *must* be an answer to the situation if he was only clever, or persistent enough to figure it all out. He went over the recent happenings thoroughly, literally examining bit by bit each moment of the time he had spent on the train. He was convinced that everything had been harmonious at breakfast—there had been no evasive looks or frightened actions then; so whatever happened, *must* have taken place sometime after breakfast. He recalled the people on the observation platform and suddenly, like a drop of cold rain water from a leaky roof as it splashed on his forehead, he grasped the situation—he knew the answer.

The girl’s remark about the funny-looking car—then his excitement at recognizing it!

“Darned if I blame them one bit! Guess it must have sounded pretty oafish to hear me yelling “Sylvia” at the old wreck of a car and babbling about an old hearse and a pretty girl who sang like an Angel!” He laughed to himself, just as the train paused at Pasadena. He saw the young man who sat near him, standing on the platform and

he waved and smiled to him, then got his bag ready, adjusted his tie and brushed his hat with a clean handkerchief; for he was positive that the porter would not venture near enough to him to brush him off—even for a generous tip!

Had two men in white uniforms been waiting for him as he stepped off the train, he would not have been very much surprised. However, no one paid any attention to him; the entire incident on the train, was swallowed up in the mad rush at the big Union Station in Los Angeles. Hi hurried to a telephone booth where he finally got a call through to the Cucamonga address that Learned Meeks had given him, and a woman's voice informed him:

"No sir, the Learned Meeks' ain't here yet—but we're expectin' them any time now!"

By consulting a large map of Los Angeles and vicinity, and asking a few questions at the information desk, Hi located an ideal lodging place—a vantage point from which he could await Zenobia's arrival. He would also be close enough to both Hollywood and Los Angeles, in case he could be of any help after she arrived and began her quest for recognition as a singer. What was also important, was the fact that the location he had chosen offered easy access to two golf courses and to Santa Anita race track. He took a cab to a small hotel which was located near several arteries of bus and street car transportation. Since he no longer had Sylvia, he must rely upon taxies, busses and street cars to take him to the various places he hoped to visit.

The first thing he did after he was shown to his room on the third floor, was to call the sheriff's office and attempt to report the loss of his stolen car—which he was sure was headed for California, perhaps Los Angeles. He had difficulty in giving a clear description of the roadster over the telephone. When he began telling which fender was blue and had been salvaged from another make of car, of the top, which was still from another make and some of the instruments in the dashboard, which had formerly belonged to a different car of about the same size, the gruff voice at the other end of the wire, asked him if he was *sure* that he had a car stolen. Did someone break into his junk yard and take a few odds and ends with which to patch up a hot-rod job? Then he told Hi to come in in person to sign the complaint about the stolen car and give a better description of it.

Having better than seven hundred dollars in his pockets, gave him a chance to plan, to hope and to be able to do things. He wished that Zenobia was with him; not only be-

cause he knew that she would be practically broke when she arrived in California, but because she seemed to be an important part of every plan he had in mind—with the single exception of one impulse. He knew that she would not approve of this particular idea; but if it turned out as he hoped it would, she was bound to be less critical—but—He grasped the telephone and again called the Cucamonga address. The same woman's voice, who had answered his call less than an hour ago, again informed him that the Meeks family had not arrived. In his haste, Hi forgot to leave the address of the hotel where he was registered so Zenobia might call him. He hung up the receiver and sat staring into space for a few seconds.

In his mind, he visualized the results of the big modern house trailer, drawn by the ancient hearse and both overflowing with the Meeks family, should the entourage happen to pass down Hollywood Boulevard!

"Why I'll bet it would attract as much attention, and more comment, than the Rose Parade on New Year's day!" he thought. Then he smiled broadly as he recalled what Zenobia had said to him as he prepared to leave them at Winslow: that she supposed he would try to win a fortune, then catch a plane and meet her in Los Angeles with a brass band! He was well aware that Los Angeles was noted throughout the world for her social, civic, cultural and commercial accomplishments; and that the glamorous Hollywood, which clung like a train to Miss Los Angeles' gown, was the place where the impossible could, and often did happen. There publicity was plentiful and the unusual was supposed to happen to those connected with the city of Make-believe!

The smile broadened as Hi turned through the pages of the telephone directory. He resolutely dialed a number and when the girl at the switchboard of Horizon Pictures Inc. answered, he asked to speak to the publicity department. A snappy voice answered as head of that department and asked who was speaking.

"Want to take some immensely extraordinary pictures?" Hi asked.

"We're always looking for "different" pictures. What's on your mind?"

"A twenty year old hearse, towing a six thousand dollar trailer that's as modern and as long as a coach on the Stream liner—a family of fifteen and a pretty girl who sings like an Angel!"

"Are you kidding?"

"No sir! If I had wanted to put over one of my jokes, I'd have called the script department!"

"Where is this—this house trailer and big family and the Angelic miss?"

"On Highway 66."

"Well now Chum, Highway 66 covers a lot of territory between here and Chicago! Can't you be a little more specific? Is the outfit this side of—well say, this side of Oklahoma City?"

"Oh sure, it should be in California by now!"

'We-l-l, I don't know about this!" The voice at the studio hesitated. "It doesn't sound very realistic to me. Are you sure that it's a hearse that's being used to pull the trailer?"

"Positive!"

"I see; but now tell me, what is your interest in this deal? What do you expect to receive for the information that you are so anxious to give us?"

"Do you mean —am I asking for money? No sir-ee! I don't want and will not accept a penny! All I'm interested in is seeing a family of good honest Americans get a fresh start in life and for the girl who sings like an Angel to find an appreciative audience!"

"Well, that clears things up somewhat. Now if you'll be so kind as to tell me where the hearse, trailer, big family and the girl are headed for, or where you think we can locate them, I'll see what the big boss thinks about it."

Hi gave him the address in Cucamonga where the Meeks family was headed, and where Meeks was supposed to have a job waiting. He informed the publicity man that the girl would probably remain with the Meeks until she found a suitable parking space for her trailer. Then he hung up the receiver and began a hasty perusal of the race-track news. What he read, sent his blood pressure up a couple of degrees and the thirst for a daring bet into his mind. He called a taxi, as the cars and busses were too slow for his present plan and was whisked to the famous track, which occupies a section of the old Lucky Baldwin estate. There he placed several bets on the Crosby horses, then mingled with the crowd, waiting for a certain opportunity. He had a system all his own, and he felt as if some of the luck which had been showered upon the former owner of the land he now trod on, would be sprinkled upon him today.

As he leaned against the railing, watching the horses,

jockeys, trainers and the excited milling crowd, a stranger edged up to him and asked:

"How're ye bettin' on Sleepy-Eye, Buddy?"

"Ten to one he comes in seventh!" was Hi's quick response as he looked closely into the face of the man beside him.

"Aw, you're crazy!" the man replied impatiently. "Dis Sleepy-Eye is a fine horse—an' he's goin' places!"

"I said ten to one he comes in seventh. Wait another five minutes and he'll be so sleepy he won't even start in the race!"

"It's a bet! Ten t' one. Boy, jes' you wait till you see dat feller run!" the stranger warned.

"That I should have to wait so long!" Hi retorted; still wondering where he had seen the man or who he reminded him of.

"Haven't I seen you before?" Hi finally asked, as he sized up the ordinary looking man in the ordinary looking brown suit, brown shoes and lighter brown hat.

"Maybe!" the man in brown replied boastfully, "I've been around—Noo Yawk, Phillie, Chi—most o' de tracks frum de Blue Grass to Corpus Christie!"

"No, I've never been to either place; but there's something about you—Oh well, never mind, perhaps it's only in my confused mind! I've been through a lot of odd happenings during the past week!"

"Only *one week* o' odd e'speriences?" the man laughed. "Say, I've lived forty two years—an' ever' minnit o' 'em has been odd e'speriences!"

Hi didn't care to recite any of the details of his own adventures and did not wish to hear about the stranger's encounters, so he moved slowly about in the fringe of spectators and made three more similar bets. Then returning to the railing he waited beside the strange yet familiar figure until the first race started—and ended with Sleepy-Eye living up to his name by coming straggling in seventh. Hi held out his hand and received his money, collected his other bets and said to the man in brown:

"I'll see you tomorrow; when two more of Crosby's horses run!"

Richer by almost two hundred dollars and anxious for another chance to clean up in a big way the following day, he returned to his room and telephoned once more to find out whether Zenobia and her traveling companions had arrived. She had not; and the voice at the other end of the wire, who said she was Learned's cousin's wife, was excited

and said that she wished that they would hurry and get there! She did not know what had happened, or what was about to happen, but there were a lot of people who said they were from a motion picture studio, had been there and inquiring about the new Meeks family—said they wanted to take some pictures and were even sending camera crews out on Highway 66 to meet them! The flustered voice said she wondered what all the fuss and feathers was about; and Hi assured her:

“Oh it's only Hollywood's way of greeting new-comers to the State; especially this vicinity!”

“Well, maybe so! But they didn't greet me and my family like that when we arrived here twenty-nine years ago! No sir, they didn't! We camped near a dump yard and lived in a tent for almost a year until my husband got the job he holds now and we've been here ever since! Oh I do wish Learned would hurry! Those men are swarming all over the ranch—in trees and I just saw two of them setting up a funny looking contraption on the roof of the garage!”

Hi had a few important calls to make, then he ate dinner in a well known restaurant, picked up an evening paper and returned to his room to read and reread the sports section. Before retiring, he placed his new billfold in his shoe—like Zenobia had instructed him to do. Then remembering what had happened to both shoes and wallet when his car, clothes and money were stolen, he took the purse and thrust it between the mattress and box springs of his bed. Next he locked the door, left the key in the keyhole and placed the back of a chair against the lock, so no one on the outside could punch the key out then reach under the door with a piece of wire and get the key. This he had often seen done in the movies and read about in detective stories. He made sure that the windows were unaccessable from the outside before he decided to leave them raised a few inches to allow plenty of fresh air to get into his room.

He was awakened at seven forty-five the next morning by the screeching of an ambulance as it raced by beneath his window. He ate breakfast, then decided that it was useless for him to go in person to report the loss of his car Sylvia to the authorities. The thieves could have gone most any place except to Los Angeles; and he doubted whether anyone but himself, who knew each and every one of the little car's weak spots, could drive it this far,

He certainly could not expect a brigade of law enforcement officers to start dashing about on the various high-

ways leading into the state and branching off into others leading to different counties and cities just to look for a vehicle which he, himself could not describe! He consoled himself with the fact that he was positive that he had seen two men in the car when he sighted it from the train; and that he had duly reported his loss to the officers in Arizona—who would no doubt, send out a description of the car to the sheriffs in surrounding states. As he taxied to the race track, Hi tried to think of a suitable epitaph to the loss of Sylvia—something suitable to her versatility and endurance, which he could engrave on his memory as something irreplaceable that had departed!

The hauntingly familiar “something” about the man he had met the day before, had kept pestering him and he had no difficulty in locating him—in fact, the man was searching among the early arrivals for Hi when they met, and he greeted him by saying:

“One hundred to one that Drowsy Babe comes in ninth!” To which the exasperated stranger replied:

“All right! ye asked for it! I’ll take yer bet! Why man, that filly is one o’ Bangs most promisin’ horses!”

“It’s action, not promises that pay off in horse races as well as most everything!—Honestly fellow, are you sure that we have never met before?”

“Could be possible. I’ve met a lot o’ guys, some of ’em looked a lot like you. It takes a lot o’ people t’ keep the tracks runnin’ an’ as I said before, I’ve been around—Noo Yawk, Chi, Phillie—”

“And from the Blue Grass State to Corpus Christy!” Hi completed the man’s little speech for him and added: “Just skip it; I’m sure that it was only someone who looked like you!”

He circulated among the crowd and made five small bets; then he returned to the railing, where the stranger seemed to have a permanent place, and leaned on his elbows beside the man in brown. Assuming a bored and impatient look, he watched the horses run; and come in with Drowsy Babe toddling in in ninth place! He collected his bets; and was again accosted by the man from the Blue Grass State to Corpus Christie who seemed bitterly disappointed; yet he said stubbornly:

“Listen Mister! It’s been my experience dat th’ same man’s stables don’t loose t’ree in a row! So, tell ye what! I gotta car parked over there at th’ edge o’ th’ parkin’ lot; an’ I’ll bet ye dat car ’gainst what ye just won on Sleepy Babe,

dat Siesta comes in a full length ahead o' all th' others—
Now, what d'ye say t' that offer?"

"Let's take a quick look at the car. I sure could use a good car right now!" Hi said, as he followed the determined fellow who said, as he took a short cut to the parked car:

"Dis is a dandy little car; wouldn't want t' part with it m'self. An' I ain't got nothin' t' worry about; cause I feel confident dat Bangs third horse will make up for what t'other ones lost!"

Hi didn't reply as he followed the stranger among parked automobiles of all makes, models and colors, to where a ragged and bored individual leaned against a rusty and badly bent blue fender. He didn't notice the man; but stopped short, stared a moment, clasped his hands in glee and calling in a quivering voice "Sylvia", he rushed passed the man in brown and laid an arm across the battered hood, just back of the drooling radiator.

Soapy, who disliked horse races almost as violently as he detested baths, was clad in the clothes that Grabby had discarded when he put on Hi's brown suit, about fifteen hundred miles back on 66. He had taken the old grease-covered coveralls, that Hi had left in the car, out of the car and spread them over the left fender and searched the pockets, the only ones that Grabby had overlooked. His search had yielded two sticks of chewing gum, a clean white handkerchief, two twenty-five cent pieces, a dime and seven pennies. He had started to slip the loot into the pockets of his trousers while his partner was absent and of donning the coveralls for warmth, in place of the overcoat that he did not possess, when he saw the stranger with Grabby. When Hi recognized the car in such a positive manner, Soapy sensed that something had gone wrong—just as he had prophesied! Dropping the coins into his pocket and unconsciously clutching the coveralls in his hands, he said:

"Grabby! Let's scam!"

Grabby was so surprised that he did not know what to do or say; but sudden instinct, combined with Soapy's suggestion, told him to follow his pal's advice—for once. He turned to join Soapy, who was already on his way, when, quick as a cat who had been waiting patiently for hours to catch a fat mouse, Hi caught the stranger who had just attempted to offer his Sylvia as a bet, by the collar. It was *then* he remembered what was so familiar about the man—he was wearing his very own brown suit, hat, shoes, shirt and tie! Hi twisted his fingers in the loose fitting collar, so

there was no chance for his prisoner to get away. Giving him a vicious shake, he hissed between his clinched teeth:

"So-o! You're the dirty louse who stole my car, my money and my clothes and left me out there beside the road, with nothing but that dad-blasted blanket between me and decency"

Grabby tried in vain to mutter excuses or denials; and he hoped that Soapy would come to his aid—but he got a glimpse of his pal as he ducked past several cars! In the fleeting and critical moment, Grabby remembered having mentioned that the Lincoln Heights jail was rumored to have hot and cold running water, that every man has his own private cell and that they slept in pink-striped pajamas. He suspected that Soapy was thinking about the same thing and it was useless to expect him to come to his aid.

Hi hustled Grabby between a big blue sedan and a station wagon and fairly shook him out of his clothes! One by one, he tossed the hat, coat, shirt and tie, the pants and then the shoes into a pile and as the last shoe was removed, he said: "There now! You sniveling thief! Perhaps this will give you a chance to find out how it feels to be left in public, garbed in nothing but your skivvies! Now beat it before I take you by the scruff of the neck and parade you around the race track before all those people!"

Fearful that Hi would carry out the threat, or have him arrested; and with no alternative, Grabby lit out—clad only in a pair of Hi's best rayon striped socks and a suit of his own underwear. It had originally been long underwear; and they were warmer than any of that in Hi's suitcase. The sleeves had been cut off at the elbows and the legs were snipped off just above the knees. There was a fringe of threads dangling from the jagged, unhemmed edges. The lap in the back was kept closed by the use of a huge safety pin.

Grabby didn't take time to look for Soapy, but raced past the rows of cars and headed for the covering of a clump of bushes that grew beside the road, a hundred yards away.

Hi grinned as he watched the thief sprint across the parking lot, then down the road and dive into the bushes. He saw Soapy's head appear from below a culvert a few yards farther on and saw him motion to his pal to join him—offering the greasy coveralls as a special inducement.

Inside the car, Hi found his suitcase, with almost everything intact. His golf bag was there and so was the spare tire; but the extra can of gasoline was missing. Searching through the pockets of the brown suit, which was soiled

and wrinkled, he found his wallet and even his fountain pen. He closed the luggage compartment, got into the car, closed the squeaky door tenderly, then lightly stepped on the starter. The motor started easily and, smiling like a child who had just recovered a long lost favorite toy, he started back to town; and to find Zenobia so he could tell her *all* the good news!

Chapter Eleven

THE LAST MILE

LIFE FOR THOSE in the trailer and the hearse was not the same after Hi quit the party to remain behind and play in the golf match. Zenobia missed him terribly. Learned Meeks became less sure of himself as all familiar roads lay hundreds of miles behind a stretch of mysterious highway that led up and down mountains and across bleak desert country lay before him.

When they stopped at the base of a hill for lunch, Learned was somewhat worried about the old motor; and Zenobia was in a reflective mood. Gramp and Granny joined the children in forgetting the past and looking to the future with bright expectations. The three older boys had heard so much concerning orange and lemon groves from their relatives in Cucamonga, that they thought California was one big orange and lemon grove. Lillie's mind revolved around the one idea of getting started to school and "learning to be a teacher."

Ruthie, Sara and Sallie wanted to see the Pacific ocean and gather seashells. Each of them had promised school-mates back in Piney, that they would send them huge boxes of pretty shells. Aggie Meeks was kept so busy washing little faces and hands, answering difficult questions and seeing that her big brood were all properly clothed and fed, that she had little time for thoughts or plans of her own—if she did, she kept them to herself.

Zenobia had slept a few hours; but she was restless and worried.

"If Hi had only taken some money! He is just too stubborn and too sure of himself to be left alone!" she remarked, as they finished a big chocolate cake that they had purchased at a bakery counter a few miles back.

"Now, Miss Zenobia! Don't ye go worryin' 'bout thet

young man—he knows what he wants; an' is willin' t' take chances an' t' work hard t' git it!" Learned advised the harassed girl. "I miss him a heap too; but I wouldn't a wanted him t' miss a chanct t' better hisself jes t' come along an' help drive th' Cad-lak. My! but thet boy sure does know automobiles!"

During the day, the miles fell slowly behind; they seldom made more than twenty miles per hour—and it was usually much less than that. Learned was obeying Hi's warnings not to urge the old car which was pulling such a tremendous load. It seemed that it was necessary to stop at almost every other gas station in order to keep the tank filled, the way the eight old cylinders drank it up and belched smoke.

As Zenobia paid for a tankful of the precious fluid, Learned remarked happily: "Hit shore was lucky fer us that we met you Miss Zenobia! Otherwise we'd all be a settin' back thar a few hun'ard miles with no gas an' oil an' no grub t' feed all these mouths, an' no money t' buy anything with! I hadn't figgered on it costin' so much t' drive t' Cook-mungie, er I'd not a paid out s' much to ship them trunks an' boxes by train. I'd jes left them in a neighbor's smokehouse 'till I got t' Cook-mungie an' got a job, then I'd a sent fer 'em!"

"I'm very glad that it has been possible for me to help out a bit; and believe me, it is worth every penny of it!" Zenobia assured him.

A short time past midnight, they picked up a nail and pulled to one side to replace the damaged tire with the second one that Zenobia carried in the trailer compartment. There was plenty of room in the car and trailer where it would be clear of the highway; and when Zenobia saw Aggie dozing, with two sleeping children in her lap, one huddled in the seat beside her and the fourth asleep on the ledge at her back, she suggested that they all get some sleep, at least until daylight, before they attempted to change the tire. Learned admitted that he was tired and that a few hours sleep would be good for all of them. They made a shake-down for the two younger children, who slept in the upper berth in the breakfast nook section, Zenobia climbed up into that bed, and soon the weary travelers were sleeping soundly.

The following day an early snowstorm in the mountains slowed their progress and caused the Meeks family to get what few coats and sweaters, caps and scarfs as well as a few pairs of gloves they had brought along. Most of their

heavy winter clothing had either been discarded or shipped, because they expected perpetual sunshine in California when they got there, and had planned to be not more than a week enroute. When they descended the other side of the mountain, they ran into a heavy rainstorm, which compelled them to pull to the side of the road and wait until it had subsided.

At the inspection station near Needles, they were delayed again, while two surprised agents went through bags, boxes and suitcases and every conceivable hiding place in the old hearse. Then they searched through the many compartments, drawers, chests and cubbyholes in the big trailer. The dreaded ordeal of the inspection over and knowing that they were actually in California, acted as a strong tonic for all fifteen members of the family.

Learned was confident that the old Cad-lak would hold out until they reached the end of their journey—but if it should happen to break down, he would call his cousin and have him come and get them.

The Meeks children were disappointed to see barren desert land instead of trees laden with golden oranges; or at least palm trees along the road. Nate and his wife, Utopia, sat in the corner at the rear of the coach, talking in low, animated whispers—their eyes searching for some of the glorious things that they had hoped to see in California.

Zenobia tried to dismiss Hi from her mind; but he kept appearing as a part of all her plans.

Those last miles after they entered the sovereign state of California seemed to be the longest ones. The children stayed awake as long as they could, each hoping to be the first to see the ranch where they were to make their future home. The younger ones were put to bed and the older ones finally became discouraged when the signposts along the way kept reminding them that there were more miles between them and their goal. Learned drove all night.

Zenobia remained dressed and ready to make fresh coffee when they had to stop for rest. She sat at one of the side windows, taking note of the few towns and country gas stations they passed during the night. She wondered if Hi was still at the golf course. Hi had no idea whether he intended to remain there for just one day, or would prolong his stay indefinitely. Now she wished that he might be with her, so they could enter this new land where their hopes and plans had led them, together.

As though some great Ruler with a golden scepter in his

hand, was leading the way, the golden rays of the sun which was appearing over the rim of the mountains they had recently crossed, reached ahead of them and lighted the way as Zenobia's caravan neared the end of the journey. The last mile had stretched into ten long anxious miles, according to their impatient minds. Highway 66 was a busy one, with produce trucks, huge loads of hay being hauled to the stockyards in Los Angeles, oil and gasoline being taken to the various service stations, an occasional passenger bus and many passenger cars, headed East and late drivers arriving in the West.

Learned kept well to the right of the highway; for, according to the map his cousin had sent him, he would turn to the right off 66 when he came to a certain sign in the corner of an orange grove.

The three older boys were sound asleep in the rear of the hearse and the other children, who had grown weary of watching, and disappointed at not seeing orange laden trees, were asleep in the trailer. Zenobia sat beside Gramp and Granny. They watched the activities of the little towns as they passed through. All three were anxiously waiting to see what their future homes would be like.

Granny was obviously the most eager member of the three. She rambled on about the many things that she hoped to see and do. The ocean, the big stores, the fine homes of famous people and the places of entertainment which had a reputation even in the staid little community around Piney, were on her visiting list. Laying her brown, wrinkled hand on Zenobia's smooth white one, the little old lady said, with a cackle of laughter between her words: "He he! I jes' might git m'self some stylish clothes an' go out an' make some o' thet "whoopie" th' young'uns talk s' much 'bout! Yes, an' I'm a good mind t' sew a wild oat er two—an' I might even learn t' rip a carpet while I'm at it!"

"You mean 'cut a rug' don't you dear?" Zenobia said, the old lady's odd remarks causing her to giggle too.

"Aw piffle! What's th' dif-rence whether ye *cut* er *rip* it—jes as long's ye're havin' fun a doin' it?" Granny replied.

"I guess you have the right idea Granny! I'm sure that you are going to have a lot of fun—you and Gramp and that wonderful son of yours and every member of his big, lovable family. I'm going to personally see to it that you do!"

"Thank ye dearie!" Granny continued in a more sober vein, "I mean t' enjoy th' balance o' m' days here—not thet I'm complainin' about th' past mind ye! Why ef'n I had it

t' do over, I'd work jes' as hard t' raise m' chil-ren; why bless 'em, all seven o' 'em is worth their weight in gold! But jes' about th' most excitin' things that ever happened t' me year after year, outside o' havin' an' raisin' m' family, was a settin' a hen in th' spring, weedin' th' garden an' a scratch-in' ticks an' chiggers in th' summer, makin' a kettle o' soap in th' fall an' knittin' a pair o' socks in th' winter!"

They were interrupted by the sight of a large truck, bearing a sign: "HORIZON PICTURES, INC.", atop of which was a motion picture camera focused on the hearse and trailer. At the other side of the highway, Zenobia could see another camera-equipped truck. They were apparently taking pictures of her trailer and the Meeks' hearse from various angles. She could not understand the purpose or why they happened to be at that place so early in the morning. Finally she decided that a newsreel photographer had seen them and was recording the strange looking equipment for the benefit of theatre goers in the north and south, the east and perhaps to the little islands of the seas. She smiled wryly when she thought of seeing the picture of herself entering wonderful California!

One could hardly see through the front window, for the cloud of black smoke from the exhaust on the old Cadillac had coated it with a dark film. Zenobia hurried from side to side of the coach and looked out to see the cameras in action. The smoke seemed to be getting worse—it was everywhere. She knew that the end of the journey, as far as the hearse was concerned, was near when the coach left the main highway and turned into a narrow driveway which led to a ranch house nestled amid tall lemon trees. She rushed to the door, flung it open, gasped and exclaimed: "Oh, no! Not this!" for they had stopped between the rows of trees where smudge pots were sending up billows of smoke to protect the young fruit from the first slight freeze of the season!

The snowcapped mountains glistened in the early light. The pre-dawn cold lingered and nipped at Zenobia's nose. To her surprise, she noticed cameras were stationed at vantage points to record the arrival and unloading of the Meeks family. She remained indoors while Granny and Gramp hustled to the ground. The children began discarding night clothes and pulling on whatever was handy for them to dress in.

When Lillie felt the gust of cold air through the open door, she asked suspiciously: "Miss Zenobia, are you *sure* that we are in Callie-fornie?"

"Yes dear. See the lemon trees, some of them have blossoms on them! Those odd looking heaters are put there to chase away the freezing air so the young fruit will not be damaged."

"But I thought it was sunny in Callie-fornie!" the girl persisted.

"And so it is! See the sun glistening on those snow-capped mountains? I understand that it does get very cold during the night, even in the summertime; but the sun makes the days warm. It is a climate that is altogether different to that where you came from; one has to get used to it—or as they say: one must become acclimated to California weather!"

Snatching up the "littlest" twins in each arm, Aggie squeezed through the narrow door of the cab, joined her husband, Gramp, Granny and Mr. and Mrs. David Meeks, who had emerged from the house, and were greeting the new arrivals with "hellos", handclasps and a few noisy kisses. The babies whom Aggie was holding, became frightened and began to howl and beg to "do back 'ome!" Learned took one of them and tried to comfort him while Aggie consoled the other by trying to get her to look at the pretty blossoms on the trees and the funny looking stoves on the ground.

Little Johnny, with his shoe laces trailing and his blue jeans on backwards, with the suspenders dangling in front of him, sidled up beside his mother and refused to say hello, or to shake hands with the California Meeks. Asa and Adam ran up and greeted his father's cousin, then went over to inspect one of the smudgepots. Seth, who had spent more time in putting on his clothes, strolled nonchalantly into the midst of the two Meeks families and said: "Hello everybody! So *this* is Callie-fornie!", reached up, pulled a branch of a lemon tree down and sniffed at the fragrant blossoms.

Zenobia helped the girls to get dressed by buttoning Sara's and Sallie's dresses for them, fastening a clasp on Lillie's hair and helping Ruthie with a knotted shoe lace, then she and the four girls filed out with the group of hilarious Meeks. In doing so, she walked straight into the focus of a camera and made a smiling close-up.

"Oh boy! You must be the young lady who sings like an Angel!"

"Well, since I never had the pleasure of hearing an Angel sing, I'm sure that I can't affirm or deny that!" Zenobia

replied; and began to wonder how or where this stranger had heard about her singing — then she knew: "Hiram Hills!"

Learned made a valiant, but rather clumsy effort, to properly introduce his cousin and his wife to Zenobia; and Mrs. David Meeks exclaimed:

"Lan' sakes Miss Zenobia! I'm so glad to know ye; an' before I fergit it, or he calls again, I want to tell ye that somebody, a man 'twas, called on th' phone fer ye. Yes he phoned several times askin' if ye had 'rived yet!"

"Did he leave his name or a number where I could call him?"

"No," the woman replied thoughtfully, "Th' funny part o' the story is: he said, when I asked his name, he said jes tell you 'high!' an' said he'd call again b'fore long!"

At that moment a man who introduced himself as Ben Boardman, a representative of Horizon Pictures Inc., began to apologize to Learned and to Zenobia for having taken the pictures without first getting their permission to do so. Learned assured Mr. Boardman that it was quite all right, so far as he was concerned; and that he felt flattered and highly honored at such a grand welcome.

"Does them machines take pictures what move and talk, like the ones we see in Piney?" Sara asked.

"Yep daughter! I reckon they do!" Learned replied, "Now ye can write t' yer frien's back home an' tell 'em thet you've 'peared in pic'ers!"

"Mr. Boardman, how did you happen to know that we would arrive today or any day?" Zenobia asked.

"Oh I don't know how the office learned that you were expected to arrive. I got orders from the big boss to bring my crew out here on 66 and take a few shots of the arrival. Such a nice big house trailer; best I've ever seen!—The er, *unusual* tow car and big family—just regular routine work; we take pictures of everything from forest fires to frog jumping contests!"

She accepted the explanation; but still retained a suspicion that Hi had had a finger in the affair, and she meant to find out just what he had done, when she saw him again.

Now that most of the pictures had been taken, the cameramen, truck drivers and assistants gathered around the old hearse for a close inspection and a close-up to capture in picture every ingenious device that the Meeks had employed. Learned beamed at the attention being paid his

family and the faithful old car; waving his big hands towards the hearse with pride of possession.

"Yep!" he said, th' ol' Cad-lak got us here safe an' sound—well now I reckon they're all here; I ain't counted th' young'uns yet! B'lieve me Mr. Boardman, I'm mighty proud t' think th' ol' car pulled thet big house trailer a'fair—an' it's a beaut inside—an' all us Meeks an' Miss Zenobia clean frum Al-b-qwerkie to Callie-fornie! An' I want t' tell ye somethin' more, an' thet is: This Miss Zenobia Starr here is a mighty fine young lady! Don't know how we'd a made out without her help—Yes Sir, she shore has been a real frien' t' me and m' family; an' mark my word! She'll be a splendid addition t' th' pop'lashun o' Callie-fornie!"

"Thank you Mr. Meeks! Those were beautiful words and I'll try to live up to them!" Zenobia said as she smiled and curtsied ever so slightly to the big, uneducated man who had paid her such a pretty compliment.

"Mr. Meeks, would you consider selling the — the hearse?" Ben Boardman asked.

"Hadn't t'ot nothin' 'bout it—Why d' ye ask?"

"How would you like to have a nice big, nine passenger station wagon to drive your family about in?"

"Wal-l, oh one o' them things'd cost like th' mischief!"

Boardman continued:

"We might arrange it—just think, a big roomy station wagon; three wide seats an—"

"Would it be a Cad-lak?" Learned asked cautiously.

"Perhaps we could locate a Cadillac; but I know where there is a good Buick and—well why don't you ask the family what they think about the offer?"

"Wal now I don't know—'pears t' me they must be a ketch t' th' offer some'ers, an' I don't aim t' be taken in b' no city slicker schemes! State yer offer open an' above board!"

"My offer is the Buick Station wagon for the old hearse here—no money or promissory notes involved; just an even exchange! Now does that sound any better?"

"Oh Pa! take the station wagon! I seen one in Piney onc't an they are—are *scrumptious*! Please do Pa; it would be so much nicer t' sit on a seat an' ride than to have t' huddle up like chickens on a roost, in th' back o' th' Cad-lak!" Lillie pleaded. Turning to Mr. Boardman and flashing a confident smile, she announced: "I'm goin' to' school out here an' learn t' be a teacher!"

"Well, good for you little lady! Tell me, what kind of

a school would you like to attend to get your degree?" the man from Horizon Pictures said to the interesting child.

"Are there very many different kinds of schools? Oh yes! Now I remember! Onc't my teacher back in Piney read a story to us; an' it was about a girl who went away t' school; th' kind where ye eat an' sleep there an' don't go home only on vacations—an' I've always reckoned that I'd like t' go to a quittin' school too!" the little Miss said decisively.

"A *quitting* school?" Mr. Boardman repeated, evidently a bit puzzled," I—well you see, I don't know very much about girl's schools—I'm a bachelor!"

"I'm sure she means a *finishing* school!" Zenobia said, trying to suppress her laughter.

"Well shucks!" the girl exclaimed, "What's th' diff'rence in quittin' an' finishin'? Yer *done*!"

Before Boardman and his crew left, the old Cadillac hearse had been exchanged for a shiny, Deluxe station wagon with varnished paneling, deep maroon fenders and hood. The old hearse would soon be on its way to join the collection of old, odd, famous and glorified vehicles on the studio prop lot. The entire Meeks family, including Gramp and Granny had been promised a tour of the studio. Just as soon as arrangements could be made, there would be scholarships provided for Lillie where she could "learn to be a teacher" and one for Seth, who liked to tinker with machinery. A check for two hundred and twenty-five dollars was presented to Learned to tide his family over until he got settled in his new job.

Mr. and Mrs. David Meeks insisted that Zenobia should remain with them and rest up after the long trip—or better still, stay with them until she found a job. She was determined however to move on closer to Los Angeles, before she started out in search of that little professional niche which she hoped to occupy.

The neighboring rancher, whom Learned was to work for, had a friend who owned a trailer camp near Alhambra. He telephoned and had a space reserved for Zenobia's trailer, then dispatched his eldest son with a light truck to tow the trailer to the camp.

To Zenobia's delight, she found it to be an ideal location for her. Less than a block from the bus line, it had a cozy little picket enclosure with one big evergreen Acacia tree to form a background. The little corner was designed for a

large house trailer to be more or less permanently located. A defense worker and his wife had formerly occupied the space and had planted flowers and vines, many of which were now in bloom.

After she paid three month's rent in advance, the attendant connected the sewer hose, removed the big awning from the compartment and put it in place along the front side of the trailer. The awning, like the trailer, had been made to order of parachute nylon with a double roof, to insure against mist beating through during a hard rain-storm and to serve as insulation during cold weather. The snug fitting walls had little windows with drop curtains at either end along the side, and a combination storm and screen door was anchored to a collapsible frame. A strip of matching material formed a curtain along the lower edge of the trailer, making the enclosure complete and comfortable. The awning and side walls were of a restful green color with a touch of rust along the edge of scalloped valance and at the windows, to add a contrast of color. Several pieces of weather-proofed canvas covered the door of the huge thirty by ten foot room.

To Zenobia's surprise, she found a small wood heater with ising glass in the door and enough pipe to set it up where an asbestos form had been placed in one wall section. The landlord promised to save scraps of wood for her to burn in the heater and told her where she could purchase walnut and eucalyptus wood at a reasonable price. The rust and green tables and chairs and sun lounges were in place before she felt free to go into Los Angeles. She had left word with the Meeks where Hi could find her; and she expected a call at any moment.

The sun had chased away most of the chilliness of the early autumn air; but the snow on the distant mountains reminded everyone that winter was near by their white, glistening peaks and the icy breath that was blown down into the valley. Zenobia had cleaned the windows of the house trailer; but far to the east, she could see a pall of smoke hovering over the citrus groves where the Meeks family had found employment. She lit a fire in the little tin heater and pushed back a section of the awning to let the sunshine inside; making the big canvas enclosure an ideal outdoor living room.

The landlord had given her several newspapers and magazines, so she curled up on a bright colored chaise lounge to eat a late lunch and to glance through the daily

papers, to see what was happening in Los Angeles and Hollywood. In one paper, she noticed a picture of a famous couple dining at a place called the Cockatoo. In the confidential section of another Sunday edition paper, she read about a party that was held at the Cockatoo. While browsing through a magazine, she came across pictures and a story of how the place rose to the pinnacle of popularity—not only among the stars, but of the social elite, the business tycoons and visitors from all parts of the world. It was not only the superb cuisine and the sparkling beauty which attracted wealthy patrons to its gilded doors but also well-staged floor shows, singers, clever comedians and the unusual and odd happenings that were as well liked as the expertly prepared bill of fare.

Zenobia lingered over her lunch and read and reread some of the articles concerning the Cockatoo. According to one writer, the place was located between the glamorous Hollywood and the wealthy section of Los Angeles. When she had finally put the papers and magazines aside and stretched out on the couch to relax and be warmed by the sunshine which fell across her knees, she closed her eyes so she could think more clearly. Ever since she could remember, Zenobia had found that she could think more clearly, concentrate on a subject better and make plans more accurately at night after she had gone to bed, or as she was now doing, lying down with her eyes closed so that everything was excluded from view.

Imaginary pictures of the Cockatoo paraded before her. The very inception of the name of the place intrigued her and created in her mind the brilliance and stateliness of a peacocks plumage. The stories she had just read, gave her a vision of what it must be like, where the tables with their gleaming linens, sparkling glassware and shiny silver were surrounded by Cosmopolitan guests, with sweet music from the orchestra, a beautiful singer, a witty comedian or any of the other acts that were employed to attract patrons. She dozed for a few minutes; but her curiosity concerning the Cockatoo was manifested in a short dream. She dreamed that she was singing in the place, when suddenly the view before her changed. The white tablecloths had become bedspreads and the tables became beds, rows of beds in a hospital and on each bed lay a wounded man, for a fleeting instant, she was again in the Veterans' hospital in Oklahoma.

She woke up suddenly and sat up, looking about. From

the opening in the awning wall, she could see the main highway a half block away. A big red and yellow, Los Angeles bound bus sped by. Her eyes fell on the stool beside her where the magazine with the picture of the Cockatoo lay in plain view. She sat calmly looking at it for a few seconds until one of her rare "hunches" aroused her to action.

Again she opened the long chest under the divan and took out several costumes—one was an Indian dress of beads and fringe and a dazzling headdress which she had worn while playing Pocahontas in a high school play, the white chiffon creation she had worn when she sang for the veterans. There was a long-trained black lace affair which she had worn as a dowager queen and a sequined gown from "The Enchanted Forest", a Junior College play in which she had scored such a hit. She held up a mass of sparkle and feathers. The sleeves were attached to the sides of the dress with wide panels of glistening web-like net, so that when the arms were raised, they resembled the wings of a brightly plumaged bird and reflected iridescent lights of all the rainbow colors. There was a matching headdress topped by a bright red bird of paradise plume. She tried on the costume, placed the glittering headdress on her head and surveyed herself in the long mirror on the closet door. Now she strutted back and forth like a proud bird, warbled a few notes of the scale, then removed the dress and began making last minute plans for a thrilling adventure.

Her one hope centered on the urgent necessity for Hi to telephone her during the afternoon. Unless he was still wearing Learned's overalls, shirt, jumper and those dilapidated shoes, she would coax him into accompanying her to the Cockatoo that evening.

As the afternoon passed and darkness approached and Hi still had not phoned, Zenobia became impatient, went to the pay-station telephone in the corner of the camp office and placed a call to the David Meeks in Cucamonga. Mrs. Meeks assured her that Mr. Hills had not called; but had so many interesting things to tell about the Learned Meeks family, that the operator interrupted them twice to inform Zenobia she must deposit extra coins for additional over-time.

Knowing that Hi did not have a car to take her any place, even if he did locate her, Zenobia placed a call with the

local taxi cab company requesting a cab to call for her at nine o'clock that evening.

She ate a light dinner then whiled away the early part of the evening by practicing the songs she knew and liked best. After a refreshing bath and arranging her hair in two heavy braids to form a becoming base for the glittering headdress, she donned the dress with the wing-like sleeves and covered it with the long black velvet cape with the silver lining.

Waiting impatiently until the taxi was at the door, and Hi had neither arrived or telephoned, she took a small sequined covered bag which contained the very small amount of money she had left after the eventful journey to California, entered the taxi and was driven to the door of the famous night spot. Having left word with her landlord where Hi could find her and hoping that he would follow her very soon, Zenobia boldly entered the place on the heels of a party of six. It was almost ten o'clock and the big theatre restaurant was crowded almost to capacity with business men and their wives or sweethearts, celebrities, writers and out-of-town visitors.

Zenobia looked about the place, as if expecting to see someone she knew. Asking the head waiter for a table for two she was pleased when he showed her to a small table in the shadows near the door to the powder room. She ordered coffee and looked about—apparently for someone to join her—a trick she had read about recently, when an embarrassed girl dined alone. She watched with interest and minute calculations, as the floor show progressed. There was a girl singer—a girl who did not impress Zenobia as being exceptional either as a songstress or as a beauty, also a dance team who won a well deserved encore.

During the comedy skit, which was the last act of the first show, she slipped away from the table and into the powder room. Adjusting the headdress which she had rolled up and carried in her hand with her purse so as not to appear like an opera star who had just stepped off the stage, she powdered her nose, placed the cape on a hook and, her face flushed with excitement, she paused at the partially open door. Waiting until the comedians were bowing to a scattering of weak applause and adlibbing in a last desperate effort to arouse a roar of spontaneous laughter, Zenobia, calm and casual looking, despite her fast beating heart and the series of chills that ran up and down her spine, and looking like a graceful bird, strolled

up the steps to the fern and flower decked stage where the orchestra sat.

The band leader had just laid his baton aside and was preparing for an intermission, when Zenobia strolled towards the microphone. He looked about in bewildered confusion; and when she nodded for him to accompany her, he hurriedly turned through the pages of music on his stand, looked frantically at the members of his band, all of whom were as surprised as he was; but who were enjoying watching the girl. She began to hum a tune, while the flustered maestro searched for music with which to accompany the unexpected singer.

The pianist listened intently; and when she turned and smiled at him, he picked up the chord and began to play softly as she hummed louder, then began to sing: "I'VE FOUND MY RAINBOW", while the leader attempted to recover what he supposed must have been a very serious mistake on his part. Wondering who this strange girl was and what had become of the music for her act, he began to follow the cue of the pianist, and raised his baton. One by one, the other instruments joined in.

The diners listened and watched—this was a new act; something they had not expected. They believed that the appearance of the girl and the evident confusion of the orchestra was only a part of the act in which the clever ingenue was to be featured. Only a few sensed that anything out of the ordinary was taking place in this home of unique settings and unusual entertainment.

By the time she was through the first verse, the entire orchestra was in tune with her—the music minded pianist following her every mood and motion. Becoming alarmed at what might follow and deciding that his men could get along as well without him standing before them and twiddling his baton, the band leader put aside his wand and disappeared behind the prop. He dashed away in search of Mr. Adrian, the manager, to determine *why* he had been placed in such a difficult position!

While sitting in his office, Mr. Adrian had heard the beginning of Zenobia's song and the faltering orchestra. Wondering what had happened, he rushed from the office, cut across one corner of the big dining room and past Zenobia, who smiled sweetly at him. Unable to find the man he was looking for, he started around the prop where the flutist had pointed with his instrument, indicating the leader had gone "that-a-way".

Finding the manager out of his office, the flighty band leader dashed through a nearby door which led to the big kitchen. Here he dodged helpers carrying stacks of dishes, pans of hot food, carts loaded with trays of food, bottles and glasses of drinks, cooks with carving knives in their hands and brushed perilously close to huge kettles of steaming hot soup and bubbling glass coffee makers.

At the far end of the kitchen, he came face to face with the head waiter who informed him that the manager was with the musicians and was looking for him. The leader of the confused musicians dashed among the tables and to the stage where the flutist motioned that the man he was looking for, and who was looking for him had gone "that-a-way" around the props. He hurried back to the office, and finding it empty, ran his fingers frantically through his hair and whirled around, his coattail flying in the air, just as Mr. Adrian, who had traversed the length of the kitchen, came around the corner. At they came face to face, the two baffled men grasped each other's coat lapels and angrily demanded in perfect unison: "What's the meaning of this?"

Staring into each other's faces, each read the movement of the other's lips; and thoroughly convinced that the other had tricked him, they again demanded in simultaneous questions: "Why did you hire that singer without telling me?"

They were standing, glaring at each other, when the head waiter appeared smiling: "What a pleasant surprise that young lady is! Why she has captivated everyone in the house—unless it is you two!"

"Who is she?" Mr. Adrian asked.

"Where did she come from?" demanded the orchestra leader.

"Why I don't know who she is—she didn't tell me her name when she came in a few minutes ago! She asked for a table for two and sat down. No one joined her I'm positive; and just before the end of what I supposed was the last act, I saw her go into the powder room!"

Mr. Adrian and the band leader let go of the other's lapel, backed away a few inches and stood with baffled expressions veiling their faces; then Mr. Adrian spoke: "Then what happened?"

"I hardly know sir," the head waiter replied, "I was busy seating some new arrivals. When I happened to look up, this strange, but beautiful girl was standing calmly

before the microphone, humming as though she was alone—then the pianist began playing and then—Now just listen to that applause!”

“My word!” the orchestra leader exclaimed, “This is the most unusual thing that has happened in all the seventeen years that I’ve been leading a band!”

“My goodness! I’ve had *determined* applicants for jobs as singers, dancers and a host of other things, to apply here; but this is something different — and evidently my patrons are enjoying this girl’s singing! Good Lord! I hardly know what to do!—I can’t just barge in there and order her out—but—Ah me!”

The three men stood listening; then they walked back of the orchestra props, where the assembled, confused and amused musicians were trying to do justice to the girl’s singing; the words and tune which were entirely new to all of them.

It was a free for all tussle—each member of the band his own director and each interested in the interesting, if unusual technique of the singer.

Zenobia’s courage and daring was mounting at every burst of applause and every smile that was cast her way. She returned the smiles as she sang:

“ORANGES OF GOLD, OCEAN OF BLUE, OUR
LOVE SO TRUE, LAND OF ROSES, MISSIONS
SO OLD; AND RIGHT UNDER THE RAINBOW
I FOUND YOU!”

She stepped down the three steps and, graceful as a bird strutting to show off the glittering plumage, she wended her way among the tables. Pausing for an instant at a table, she almost lost her voice and composure when she looked into the face of Martin Lawrence as he sat smiling up at her! There were three other guests, another man and two ladies at his table. Lawrence was aware of what was taking place, and he nodded and smiled encouragingly to her; then began to hum the song that she was singing. Remembering how beautiful and courageously she had appeared and sung at the hospital and of her earnest desire for a chance to sing, he whispered a few words to his companions, then arose and, amid a roar of applause, he strolled along beside Zenobia and joined in singing the song which seemed familiar to him now, but was very strange less than two weeks ago.

They paused before the band leader, who was now beaming with delight. Mr. Adrian, still confused, but now showing signs of admiration, stood helplessly by. The addition of Martin Lawrence to the strange girl's act added more mystery and removed all ideas he might have had of asking her to leave or even to explain. That the great Martin Lawrence approved and abetted the girl's actions by joining the rendition of the song which, apparently, no one except these two had ever heard, was enough for him.

"If this is one of Lawrence's tricks, then it must be good!" he concluded.

The orchestra leader retrieved his baton and began waving it before the group of musicians who were having the time of their collective lives, trying to coax their instruments to accompany the voice of the attractive singer who was making such a spontaneous hit with the scores of patrons. Each felt that he had a definite part to play in this unique episode; and their interest was raised to a still higher pitch when Martin Lawrence teamed up with her!

Zenobia and Lawrence paused at the end of the first verse, while the listeners applauded—then they sang the second verse—or rather, she sang while Lawrence hummed, with the orchestra in full accompaniment. They ended in a burst of applause which brought the manager rushing forward, clapping his hands as he exclaimed; "Wonderful! wonderful! Congratulations to both of you for a splendid performance!"

"Oh you should hear Miss Starr when she really tries!" Lawrence said, obvious of the fact that Mr. Adrian, the manager of the Cockatoo, was eagerly awaiting to be introduced to the beautiful and daring girl. "Mr. Adrian, in case you haven't heard of her, this is Miss Zenobia Starr, one of the cleverest songstresses I've heard in many a day! Miss Starr, may I present Mr. Adrian, the manager of this flourishing establishment!"

"How do you do Mr. Adrian!"

"Delighted to know you Miss Starr—my, that was a wonderful er, approach you used! Couldn't have thought of a better way to introduce you and your lovely voice to my patrons, had I set up all night pondering over the matter!"

"Thank you Mr. Adrian! I hope you didn't think me rude in crashing in in such a manner; but—well, like the songs that I usually make up as I go, I also try to find new and better places to sing them!" Zenobia replied. Turning to Martin Lawrence, she said: "Thank you Mr. Lawrence for

assisting me and for the introduction to Mr. Adrian."

Mr. Adrian led the way to his office; where it required considerable explaining on Lawrence's part that, until he saw her emerge from the powder room and begin singing, he had no idea that Miss Starr was within a thousand miles of the place. Only a few days ago, he had seen and heard her sing at the Veteran's Hospital in Oklahoma. To Zenobia's amazement, the manager of the Cockatoo was even more favorably impressed with her entrance and her style of singing.

"My dear young lady," he said, "the manner in which you introduced both yourself and your delightful songs, is the most interesting, unique and promising thing that has happened to this establishment since its opening night! I have an offer to make; and needless to say, I hope very much that it is acceptable to you!"

Zenobia lingered in the office for a few minutes after she accepted the contract to sing at the Cockatoo for at least six weeks; and longer if she wished. She and Martin Lawrence went back stage, where Mr. Adrian introduced her to the band leader and his musicians and announced that beginning a few minutes before, Miss Starr was to be one of the regular entertainers. She complimented the men on their ability to accompany her songs with neither music or forewarning; then she and Lawrence returned to his table where he introduced her to the other members of his party. Before she said goodnight, she and Lawrence had arranged a date to have some recordings made of her songs that they had sung for the Veterans in Oklahoma, and possibly several more, so they could send both words and music to Davy, the practically blind violinist.

When she left the Cockatoo late that evening, she had signed a six weeks contract to sing every night, at a salary of more than twice the amount she had dared to hope, or expect to get. She also had an invitation from Mr. Lawrence to attend an important race at Santa Anita park the following day; and she had promised to be there.

As the taxi dashed along the streets, which were filled with midnight homeward bound party-goers, Zenobia sat in the corner of the rear seat, her headdress rolled up and lying beside her with the little sequinned bag. She had one foot tucked up under her in a manner that she found to be so restful. The shirred collar of the black velvet cape she had fastened close up around her throat to protect it from

the cool night air. She sat watching the stream of headlights and rows of neon signs flash past.

Other than this she wished desperately that Hi was beside her, she was filled with the exuberant satisfaction that only an artist who had seen his work accepted and appreciated can feel. Like the true artist that she was, she was not content to let this one masterpiece be her last one! She knew that the Cockatoo was only the beginning; for she was already making plans, and had chosen her subject for her next one.

C h a p t e r T w e l v e

BOUNDLESS GLORY

AFTER A BUSY DAY in which he had arrived at one of the most momentous decisions of his entire life, had closed an all-important deal and had received a job which would pay much more than the best filling station along a city street or beside a busy country road, Hi was very tired—but happy. At nine-thirty he finally succeeded in getting a phone call through to Cucamonga and was informed that Miss Zenobia had arrived and had gone on to a trailer camp in Alhambra. He repeated the address to make sure that it was right; and then wrote it down so he would not forget it.

Instead of retiring, as he had planned to do if Zenobia had not arrived, he shaved, took a bath and dressed in a new suit of deep brown—the shade that Zenobia admired and said looked best on him. Smiling at the thought of seeing Zenobia again; and anxious to tell her a lot of the things that had happened to him since he left in Arizona, he got into the little car which had been washed, cleaned inside and filled with the best grade of gasoline that the numerous pumps had to offer, which was a decided contrast to the treatment the roadster had received when he first bought it. Then lack of spending money and a lack of understanding of the needs of a motor, had prompted him to offer the cheapest fuel he could find. Anything from drip gasoline from a gas line in the oilfields where a friend's parents lived, to adulterated gas from unscrupulous dealers, was good enough for Sylvia.

He had the forethought to purchase two new robes, big, thick steamer robes of rich, yet conservative plaids. One to spread over the car seat. The other for Zenobia to spread

over her lap so she would not get cold while riding in the open roadster during the chilly California night.

He urged Sylvia to her topmost speed as he drove out to the Alhambra trailer camp; where he recognized her big house trailer; despite the inclosed awning in front of it. He came to an abrupt halt before the tiny gate in the low picket fence which surrounded the long house on wheels. Springing out and jumping over the gate instead of opening it, he raced up to the screen door in the awning wall. Unable to make a loud sound by rapping on the narrow form, he called, softly at first: "Zee-nobia! Oh 'Nobia! I'm here!"

He waited a few seconds; and hearing no sound from within the dark trailer, he tried the screen door. It was unlocked, so he opened it and stepped inside the long, canvas enclosed room and pressed the brass knocker inside the door leading to the trailer. He waited, whistled a few bars of her "rainbow" song, then knocked again. Still no sound from within; then he called loudly: "Hello Zenobia! It's me—Hi!"

Still no response, and he was beginning to feel uneasy. If Zenobia was not in the trailer, then where could she possibly be? He called and and knocked again; but received no reply. Then hearing another car stop before the manager's office, and hoping to get some information, he went to the office where the manager of the camp informed him that Miss Starr had parked her trailer there that morning. After Hi had assured the man that his name was Hiram Hills, the manager gave him a note which read: "Am going to the Cockatoo tonight. Might be late getting home.—Zenobia."

Hi looked at his watch. It was eleven thirty, so he thanked the keeper of the trailer camp and walked out, and standing beside Sylvia, he pondered a moment. He had half a mind to go inside the canvas room and curl up on one of the cots or chaise lounges and wait for her to return.

"I wonder what hour she calls late?" he asked himself; then recalling stories about night life in Hollywood and Los Angeles, he decided that "late" might mean any time between now and sunup. He was glad that he knew where she was; but according to the information he had concerning such places, he wasn't at all pleased with the idea of Zenobia being there alone—or was she alone? That thought sent a number of disturbing ideas racing into his weary mind. He tried to convince himself that it would be next to impossible for her to have secured a date in so short a time

after arriving in California. "Nobia isn't the kind of girl that would pick up a stranger on a street corner!" he assured himself. "That fellow Lawrence is probably crooning his way back from hospital to hospital. I'm sure she knew no one out here; so I guess I'd better beat it back to town and see if she needs me!" He climbed into the roadster and headed back to Los Angeles.

At a service station, he got directions to the famous night club; and a few minutes later, he parked the shabby little car in the lot provided for the great and near great who dined at the Cockatoo. Realizing that information, as well as food, in such places usually came high, he saved precious time and useless questions by slipping the head waiter a five dollar bill and bluntly asking him whether a tall, beautiful girl had dined there alone that evening.

"And does this particular beautiful girl happen to sing like an Angel?" the waiter asked.

"Why, yes she does—was I mean, is she here?"

"Yes, no and *how!*" was the confusing reply.

"What do you mean by yes, no and *how!*" Hi asked, beginning to doubt if he was getting his five dollars worth.

"I mean Sir: No the lady isn't here now; but, yes she was here and what's more everyone knew that she was here!" the waiter explained. And after a pause, when he smiled indulgently, then continued: "Yes indeed, Miss Starr was here! She took a short cut from the usual way to apply and be hired, manner of getting a contract! She dazzled them with her beauty and her gorgeous costume; and she charmed them with her singing—Yes, she and Mr. Lawrence, the famous Martin Lawrence, if you pleased, left only a few moments ago!"

"Martin Lawrence! So-o! He didn't tarry along the way! No wonder she was in such a hurry to get here—they probably had a date for tonight!" Hi thought loudly but only moved his lips; then he said: "Thanks very much for the information—good night!" And he left the place feeling that he had been betrayed by a conspiracy between the girl he loved and the man whom he suddenly decided that he loathed! Jealousy was fanning his imagination to a fury, as he walked to the parking lot. His infuriated mind conjured all sorts of situations; and promising himself and everyone concerned, that Zenobia and that—"that warbling Cock Robin", were not going to make a fool of *him*, he headed back towards Alhambra!

At Hollywood and Vine, he made the boulevard stop and

started up. When in the very center of the lanes of seething traffic, the engine died! The lights changed and horns began tooting and impatient drivers began yelling for him to wake up and move on! The cars were so close on all four sides, that he would not have had room to get out and take a look at the motor—had he been so inclined! Hi was in a belligerent mood! He stepped savagely on the starter, turned the switch on and off—he even turned the lights on and off; but not a sound came from under the battered hood!

Again the lights changed and the din of horns and angry voices grew louder. A perspiring traffic policeman scrounged through to see who or what was blocking the traffic. Cars were halted in all four directions, like a huge log jam on a river. What a sight was Sylvia, as she stood motionless in the very center of perhaps one of the most famous traffic lanes in the country, looking for all the world, like a little pooch who had strayed into a dog show where only the biggest and best could compete.

A bluecoated officer mumbled something under his breath; then giving Hi a withering look, he demanded: "What'dya mean by bringin' that bundle o' rubbish out here and dumpin' it, to create a hindrance, block th' traffic fer miles an' refuse t' move—not t' mention th' wear an' tear on th' nerves o' me profession, as well as all these homewardbound people? I ask ye now, what's the big idea? Is this supposed t' be a gag o' some sort?"

At first Hi was sullen and had no excuse or explanation; little devils of jealousy were chanting in his mind: "All right Miss Starr! Let them arrest me—throw me into a dungeon, send me to the Big Rock, even to Devil's Island, what do I care! What do you care! You and that Lawrence guy are too busy to care what happens to me!" Then the voice of Reason argued: "But what if I am mistaken, what if that waiter was mistaken, what will become of Sylvia?—I had some important plans for this little car!—What *might* happen to Zenobia? No, no! I really don't want to go to jail; I like to be free to go where I please, do as I please and eat and sleep when I please!"

Smiling at the exasperated officer, he replied meekly:

"Yes, Officer! You see, I was on a radio program and—well, here I am!"

"An' what was th' name o' that program? That People are—are—Something-or-other? Now I thought that one was on th' air three days ago—d'ye mean t' say that you're just now finishin' yer assignment?"

"No Officer, this program was called: 'Are Policemen Patient?'" Hi replied serenely; and at that moment, a youth in a stripped down car with a hopped-up motor, sighted the little roadster in apparent trouble. Thinking that it belonged to one of his band of hot-rod lovers, he wriggled up behind Hi's car, as the traffic began to detour around. Then the obliging youth eased up against Sylvia's rear bumper, yelled and signaled to Hi that he would push him.

The officer was debating as to what charges he should write on the ticket that he was intending to present to Hi when the other car offered to move the stubborn roadster. He returned the book to his pocket and his pencil behind his ear as he said: "All right! go ahead an' clear out—an' tell them radio people t' be more considerate o' th' public's welfare, the next time they think up one o' their zaney tricks! An' as fer that so-called car ye're drivin', ye better do like th' chap back there, strip it o' all nonessentials an' make a real toy of it—er just drive it to th' dump yard an' leave it there!—So long, now remember my advice!"

"All right Officer! And thanks! I'm real sorry about blocking the traffic—I'll be real careful hereafter!"

Calling to his rescuer that he was headed for Alhambra, Hi made sure that his brakes were not on, as the bumpers grated and clanged and the two cars moved forward. Slowly at first—then as the traffic thinned, the lad pushed the roadster and Hi faster and faster, until it resembled something like a sparrow perched on the tail of a B-29. They zoomed along the street, just making every green light by a split second.

There was nothing for Hi to do, except keep Sylvia in the right traffic lane and hope and pray that no pedestrian would venture across the street in front of them at this time in the morning. Suddenly he realized that it was much too late for him to be paying a social call on Zenobia; and that it would be foolish to expect an explanation of her plans or an accounting of herself at this time of night. He decided that he would go to his room, get some sleep and make a fresh start in the morning—either by bus or by taxicab.

"She's probably still out with that crooning picture from a fashion plate anyway!" he muttered to himself, then he slipped the car into gear to see if, by any chance, it would start—and it did! The motor began to hum; which was a pleasant accompaniment to the little racer with the big voice. He stepped on the gas and raced a few feet ahead of the booster car, then turning right at a corner, waved and

called "Thanks" to the youth who had rescued him, and headed for his hotel as the other car continued straight ahead.

Hi parked the roadster in a lot nearby and went to his room. Feeling tired, lonely and not a little hurt and angry at Zenobia for not waiting at the Alhambra trailer camp until he appeared, before venturing into town—and especially for having renewed her acquaintance with Martin Lawrence in so short a time, he remarked to himself, as he sat on the side of his bed, removing his shoes and socks:

"Well, I won't be at all surprised to read in the morning papers that they have eloped and got married, aw, hang it all!" he moaned, as he rolled into bed, drew the covers up around him and tried to go to sleep. He was restless; the urge to find out whether Zenobia and Lawrence were in love—had possibly got married—if she still loved him; and if so, how much, caused him to spend a miserable night and routed him out of bed an hour earlier than he had planned to get up.

He was sorely tempted to don a suit of mechanic's overalls and smear his hands and face with grease and dirt, before he went for the show-down with Zenobia. Remembering that he was now in the more or less glamorous section of California and that if there remained the slightest bit of chance for him, he realized he would have to meet his competitor with clean clothes, hands and face and some manner of professional ability.

"I can't sing," he mused, as he stood before the mirror with a thick coat of lather on his face, "but I'll bet I can beat him at golf—and if I don't look as good in that new brown suit, as he does in those Hallowe'en looking togs he wears, then I might as well retrieve my good old plaid blanket, hie myself to the hills and become a mysterious hermit! As for a job, or a position, all I want to say is, just you wait, Miss Starr and Mr. Martin Lawrence, or Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, if that's what your names are by now, you have a surprise, or two, or three, coming to you!"

He finished getting dressed, after taking a bath and using a bar of highly scented soap that had been left by some feminine guest. The new suit and bright, handpainted tie that he had purchased at a high priced haberdashery which catered to the men in the film colony, suited him perfectly. He adjusted a carefully folded handkerchief in the breast pocket of his new coat, cleaned his finger nails, then washed his hands again using the fragrant soap, leaving plenty of

the suds on them—so the perfume would linger on until he had seen and talked to Zenobia—or had received her message telling him that she and Lawrence were married. That Zenobia was, or soon would be married to Martin Lawrence, was a foregone conclusion to him. He ate breakfast in the hotel's coffee shop; then, with his fingers crossed, he went out to the parking lot to see what kind of a mood Sylvia was in.

The motor, which had balked at such a conspicuous time and place a few hours ago, responded at the first touch of Hi's polished brown clad foot; but knowing the car as he did, he kept his fingers crossed as he drove towards Alhambra. He rehearsed the little speech of forgiveness and best wishes to the girl he loved, when and if she informed him of her love for another. He was prepared to deliver an eloquent bit of oratory when he arrived at the trailer camp.

A wisp of smoke was arising from the stovepipe in the awning room, as he stopped the roadster in front of the low, white picket gate. His heart began to pound when he saw Zenobia, dressed in a dark red skirt and a dusty rose sweater, straightening the magazines on the little table in the canvas enclosed room. One section of the wall was pushed back to allow the sunshine to warm and brighten the big interior.

"Hello 'Nobia! Got time for a few words with an old friend?" Hi called, as he sat in the car, with the door open, debating whether he should get out or remain seated, ready to drive away after she had told him the sad news.

"Oh, hello Hi!" she said, as she straightened up at the sound of his voice. Dropping the magazines on a chair and smiling sweetly, she started to meet him, "I've been worried about you. I was hoping that you—say! what does this mean?" she demanded, as she realized that the car called Sylvia, was standing before her gate. The smile was suddenly replaced by a look of surprise and suspicion. Placing her hands on her hips and advancing in a threatening manner, she looked from the car, to Hi, then back to Sylvia and said: "Hiram Hills! I thought you told me that this—this rambling wreck had been stolen! I believed your hashed-up story then; but I doubt if I'd believe you now if you said the sun was shining—which it is—I suppose—"

"But wait 'Nobia! I can—"

"Explain everything! Yes Hi you are good at explaining! But don't expect me to believe any more of those fantastic yarns—like the one about you being robbed, when you

showed up dressed in that awful blanket. I'm not falling for any more stories like that!" she finally finished, trying to refrain from smiling at him in spite of her anger.

"Gee Honey! I know you must think I'm the champion liar; but honest, I'm not fibbing. I told you the truth about being robbed too and—oh, there's so many interesting things that I want to tell you!"

"All right! Come on in. I'll listen to a few of them; but talk fast, for I'm planning on catching the next bus that goes to the Santa Anita race tracks!"

"You—you're going to the races?"

"Yes, I promised Mr. Lawrence that I'd come out there today—oh, I forgot to tell you, I met Mr. Lawrence at the Cockatoo last night. I've heard and read a lot about that famous place, and also about Santa Anita, so I decided to go out and see the races!"

"Lawrence! Is he going to be there?" Hi asked.

"Oh yes! He loves the races—sort of hobby of his," Zenobia explained, as she led the way inside the big room, picked the magazines up from the big canvas chair and motioned for Hi to be seated. The very mention of the name of the male singer was like throwing a handful of darts at a balloon vender's wares. One punctured his happiness at seeing Zenobia again, another his satisfaction at knowing that she had arrived in California and was making rapid success in her venture as a singer—success in the wrong direction though, he assured himself. Another dart all but erased his elation over his own success; but the worst prick was the evident fact that Martin Lawrence had superseded him in all of Zenobia's plans and thinking.

Recalling how sweetly she had greeted him a few moments ago, he told himself: "She's only pretending! She's a kind hearted girl, even if she is fickle, she doesn't want to hurt my feelings! I'll bet she's planning on breaking the news of her love for Lawrence after she has assured me how happy she is in her new found love! All right! if that's the way she wants it, I'll be a man, and clear out—after I've had my say and—and—"

His train of thought was interrupted by Zenobia saying: "Well Hi, how did the game of golf come out?"

"Oh, the golf! Well I beat Maj. Plunkett; and won several other bets besides; and—"

"And Sylvia was waiting at the last hole—to bring you on to California!" she prompted rather sarcastically.

"No-o, not exactly! Aw gee whiz 'Nobia! I was headed for

the race tracks also! Would—would you like to ride in the old jalopy with me. Would Lawrence mind if you showed up in such a sorry looking car, and with me?"

"I'm sure that Mr. Lawrence wouldn't mind in the least! and—well, since you have your beloved Sylvia with you, and we can talk as we ride, I might as well go with you. But let's get started so we'll have plenty of time, just in case Sylvia becomes stubborn—or something!"

Zenobia ran into the main room of the trailer and donned a pink wool beret, which matched her sweater, and a loose swagger coat of the same material and deep red color as the skirt she wore. She locked the door and joined Hi, who was miserably conscious of the fact that she had not even offered to shake hands since they met—much less give him one of those delightfully impulsive kisses on the cheek, or forehead. Brushing away all suspicion and hoping to get started right, no matter how this ride ended, he removed his hat with his left hand, and putting all his hopes, good intentions and gladness at seeing her again, into one big smile, he followed her to the screen door of the canvas wall and extending his right hand, he said: "Zenobia Honey! I'm so glad to see you! I had planned so much on this meeting being everything that means happiness for both of us, of dreams realized and—well, welcome to California!"

"Welcome to California to you Hi!" she said, placing her hand in his and each clasped the other's hand in a firm clasp, which sent thrills to each confused mind and doubtful heart. She smiled up into his eyes; and he thought for a moment that she would tip-toe and plant a kiss upon his chin—instead, she reached up with her left hand and patted his cheek, straightened his new, handpainted tie and saying: "Hi, you're sweet!" linked her arm in his and they walked to the roadster. Hi straightened the new robe over the seat and helped her in, ran around to the other side and got in and sat down beside her; and silently thanking the generous Fates that she was again beside him, he stepped on the starter and the little car headed towards the famous race track, where fortunes were won and lost; where in many cases, comedy and drama was unfolded.

When they were out of the criss-cross of traffic lanes where so many stop and go signals barred their progress, Hi turned the car to the extreme right and slowed down to a slow, even pace. Without even being interrupted once by the girl at his side, he told of his winnings at the golf course in Arizona, of boarding the train for Los Angeles,

of seeing the car, Sylvia in the highway. When he told her how everyone on the train suspected him of being an escapee from a lunatic asylum, because he had yelled "Sylvia!" at the car and how they had shunned him on the train, a little tinkle of laughter escaped from her lips, as she patted his hand. He told her of his arrival in Los Angeles, of his many attempts to locate her at the ranch near Cucamonga, then of his visit to the races where he won most of his own money back from the hobo, finally found the car and discovered the thief wearing his suit!

He paused for a few seconds, then gave a graphic account of his first trip to Alhambra, then his dash to the Cockatoo, where he learned that she had just left and finally of the exasperating scene on Hollywood and Vine, where Sylvia balked.

"Well, by the time Sylvia was acting normal again," he said, "It was too late for me to go to Alhambra, so I went to bed and tried to sleep, got up and drove out and found you ready to start to the races and to keep an appointment with Martin Lawrence. Now the big question is: Do you believe my story?" Hi said, as he looked down into her expressionless face.

"Well Hi, those things could happen to no one except you—or in a motion picture plot! But I do believe you!" she replied. Detecting a note of jealousy in his voice each time he mentioned the name of Martin Lawrence, she smiled wryly and decided to keep quiet and watch for further developments. Feeling sorry for Hi and more or less ashamed of her own suspicions and distrust of him, she leaned over and kissed his cheek. Just then a long, lanky convertible with four race-bound youngsters huddled in the two seats, passed, waving their hands and tooting the horn at the couple in the shabby little roadster.

"All right! Go ahead and laugh; you darned smart-alecs!" Hi growled, "My girl's a lot prettier and sweeter than either of yours, and my Sylvia is made of a lot better material than that crawling bundle of surplus metal you're driving!"

Zenobia snuggled close to his side—so glad that Hi had explained away all her doubts concerning him and his car. She didn't mind the staring faces of passengers in other cars that whizzed past—in fact, she was as proud of Sylvia as she knew he was. After riding several hundred miles behind a smoke-belching hearse, it seemed good to be in the little car.

Hi reached down and gave the little gloved hand that

rested on her purse on her lap, a tight squeeze, as he whispered: "Thanks 'Nobia! I have a lot of plans to discuss; but here we are at the famous park, named after and a portion of a great man's estate! I'll tell you what I've planned to do and the things that I've been day-dreaming about later—after we've met Lawrence and watched the races!"

He turned the little car into the parking lot, where it somewhat resembled a rusty tin can on a green lawn, among the hundreds of other more modern cars. He left Sylvia near the spot where Grabby had parked her a short time ago, and he and Zenobia made their way to the grandstand. A devilish plan was forming in his jealous, tortured mind—he would try to get Lawrence to bet on Crosby's horses!

Zenobia saw Martin Lawrence amid the throngs of visitors; and they hastened forward to meet him. Although very much surprised to see Hi, he greeted them by saying: "Good morning Miss Starr! My word, you look even prettier in that clever outfit you're wearing now than you did in that gorgeous affair you had on last night!" And, as he offered his hand to Hi, he said: "Hello Mr. Hills! I'm very glad to see you again. How do you like our sunny California?"

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Lawrence, I've been so busy with other things that I really haven't noticed the weather; but since you mention it, I think it is very nice—and I'm glad to meet you again!"

Carrying a pipe in his hand, on which he took an occasional puff, Lawrence led the way to where an attractive lady sat waiting for him, and introduced her: "Mr. Hills, I want you to meet my charming wife. Honey, this is the chap I was just telling you about, who did such a splendid job of making the fellows in the hospital in Oklahoma laugh!"

Trying to gulp down the lump of surprise in his throat and cast the many jealous imps out of his head at the same time, Hi acknowledged the introduction to Mrs. Lawrence by bowing low and smiling broadly and uttering the conventional: "I'm very glad to know you Mrs. Lawrence."

Four husky boys, ranging in age from eight to fourteen, and each carrying a sizzling hot dog in their hands, sauntered up. Martin Lawrence continued the introduction with: "And these are my four sons. Boys, say hello to Mr. Hiram Hills; one of the cleverest joke dispensers in the country!"

"Hello, Mr. Hills!" the quartet responded. Hi greeted each one individually. He told two of them that they favored their pretty mother and the other two that they not

only looked like their father, but that he was sure that they had inherited his talents and friendliness.

Zenobia had never met the Lawrence boys; and she smiled and spoke to each of them. She had heard their proud father mention them a number of times. However, Mrs. Lawrence had been present at the Cockatoo, where she and Mr. Lawrence had sung the impromptu duets last night; and she had invited her to join them at the races.

Out of the corner of her eye, Zenobia watched Hi's expression change after being introduced to Martin Lawrence's family. He reminded her of an over inflated tire being relieved of some of its air.

The two older Lawrence boys found seats elsewhere, so Hi and Zenobia could have the ones that Lawrence had reserved in the grandstand. The races started; and Hi chatted with Lawrence while the races were in progress; but not an offer of a bet did he make to Martin Lawrence—or to anyone else! Betting had suddenly lost all of its interest and excitement for him.

They ate hot dogs and drank pop; and like two people very much alone in the very midst of hundreds of other folks, they finally returned to the roadster and drove away—not towards Alhambra or Los Angeles, but along a narrow country road which was lined with large live oak trees. Hi stopped the car near a wire fence, beyond which several black and white spotted Holstein cows gazed contentedly on the green grass which grew in the fertile soil. They sat, silently watching the cows, whose gentle and peaceful appearance reflected their feelings. The smell of the moulding leaves that enriched the soil, the grass so green and tender and the strength in the tall, spreading trees, put additional courage and determination to grow, to produce into their hearts.

Laying his arm along the top of the seat at her shoulders, he said, with a tenderness that she had never heard before: "Nobia Honey! Now that we're in California and I have a good job at the studio—oh yes, that was one of the things that I wanted to tell you! I applied at the precise time when they needed a funny guy, a sort of straight man for a program, and I auditioned and was accepted! No, no more dirty grease racks for me! No Sir! I intend to literally keep climbing that radio antenna until I get to the top; then, as soon as I can afford some kind of a home, will you marry me?"

To his complete surprise, she looked up into his face and

replied: "Sure Hi! I'll marry you—any time you say. Now I'm positive that I've really found my rainbow!"

"Oh 'Nobia honey! Gee, I'm so happy I could shout the news from the housetops! I wish I was before a microphone right now; I'd tell the whole world what a lucky and a happy man I am!" As he slid his arm off the seat back and drew her close to him and, for the first time, he kissed the tempting lips which responded to his in a manner that convinced him that she, Zenobia Starr, who looked and sang like an Angel, would soon be his wife—his sweetheart forever!

Hi poured out his plans in her interested ear; he would study and work hard to make good at the studio—some day soon, he hoped to buy a home in Beverly Hills. Perhaps he would have a membership in a golf club. She could join clubs, give parties; and together, they could live like other happy couples they knew. They would attend concerts, dance, swim and dine out together; "Yes, Zenobia darling, we'll be together forever! Even when we are old, like Gramp and Granny Meeks, we'll still be in love as they are!" Hi promised, as he kissed her again and laid his cheek against hers.

Then it was his turn to listen while she outlined her plans. Yes, she would like to fill her present engagement at the Cockatoo, and perhaps sing in other public places, so long as they did not interfere with her homemaking; but she wanted to visit the Veterans hospitals in and near Los Angeles—to make up new songs and to sing for them. "Why Hi, I have a number of books containing skits and clever dialogues, that I used at school; and I'd love to have you go over the jokes and polish them up a bit. Then we, the HAPPY HILLS, could really amuse and entertain the boys and girls who must be feeling pretty low just now—especially those in the hospital near San Francisco. There are so many evacuees from Korea, many of them young lads still in their teens, who are trying to get well so they can again plan on marriage and happiness in a home of their own, like we are. Do you think we could manage a trip up there for our honeymoon?"

"Of course we can! Oh 'Nobia, you sweet little girl! I think your plan is wonderful; and I know the boys in those hospitals will agree with me!"

They sat under the friendly overhanging branches of the old trees, and continued to plan and talk about their future. It was decided that they would establish a honeymoon cot-

tage in the big house trailer in Alhambra, with its big, spacious room, the little picket fence around the tiny yard, the blooming geraniums, carnations, fuchsias and begonias in each little niche and corner. This location would be handy to their work and would enable them to save more money to make a down payment on a real home.

Suddenly Zenobia changed the subject by saying: "Oh Hi, I must tell you about the Meeks family! I talked to Mrs. David Meeks on the phone this morning, and she told me that Learned and his family have a lovely place to live. Seems that the owner of the ranch whom he works for, recently built himself a new, big modern home some distance from the old ranch house, where they would be near the new highway, and the Meeks family is to have the old house to live in!"

"Say that's good news; and I'm glad for them. I hope it is a big house, so that family will have plenty of room!" Hi remarked.

"It is a big house—has six bedrooms, a huge living room with a real fireplace. They will have a piano, a refrigerator, washing machine and dozens of other conveniences to make that splendid family happy! Why there is a little guest cottage nearby, with a fireplace and a cute kitchen and bedroom with ruffled curtains, braided rugs and old fashioned furniture, that Gramp and Granny will live in. The big house is very old fashioned, that's why the owner left all the furnishings, which are real heirlooms in most instances, for his tenant to use; but they will please the Meeks family—oh Hi! I'm so happy for them!"

"That goes for me too Honey! And I'm going to buy Mr. Meeks a new outfit of clothes, just as I promised him, when he was big-hearted enough to loan me the one extra outfit of clothes he had with him!" Hi said.

Zenobia continued: "And that isn't half of the story Hi! They took all the children, except the "littlest" twins to school, so they wouldn't miss any more classes than possible. Lillie, who starts in high school, had such a perfect record on her report card and her last teacher had given her such a splendid recommendation, that when the child explained her determination to go to college and become a teacher, that the Girl's Vice Principal at Alhambra made arrangements for Lillie to have a few hours work at the High School each week. She can earn a few dollars to pay for supplies and for spending money. The motion picture company who had representatives there to witness our ar-

rival, have arranged for a full college course, for Lillie with all expenses paid, at Pepperdine College!"

"Gee! that's swell! That is one family who deserves all the good luck that comes their way!" Hi remarked happily.

"Oh yes, I almost forgot one item that may interest you—the motion picture company gave the Meeks a new station wagon in exchange for the 'ol' Cad-lak', as Mr. Meeks called the hearse. They're planning on seeing more of California than that citrus ranch, orchard or grove, which ever is the correct term for it. And the rancher has promised the three older boys odd jobs on the ranch after school, Saturdays and during the summer vacation. Oh yes! The motion picture company paid Seth's tuition at a Deisel school. Isn't it wonderful!"

"I can hardly wait until we get to keeping house in our big house on wheels. I hope that we can find time from our combined activities to have the entire Meeks family over to Sunday dinner and to spend a day of visiting, like they were used to back in Piney! Now if we just set up a long table out in the awning room, it would remind them of the many dinners they ate with their friends on the porches or under the shade trees in the yard. I'm warning you, such happiness as that is very contagious, so we can expect to be exposed to a lot of fun and good old sound satisfaction, while we are making them happy!"

"That's a splendid idea! We'll find time all right! I'm looking forward to that affair Zenobia, my sweet! With you beside me, any place will be a palace and any company you choose will be most welcome by me! Now give me another kiss—Ah! now don't you think we had better be on our way 'home'? This will be the last ride that we'll take with Sylvia!"

"The last?—why Hi! what is going to happen to Sylvia? You haven'—"

"Yes, I'm selling her to the same studio that bought Meeks hearse. They're going to make a picture called "THE MECHANICAL FOLLIES" and Sylvia is to be the star! Gosh 'Nobia, I hate to part with this car, but I'll have to some time, so now's the best time—when I can remember that you promised to marry me and—oh, well, I'll see the picture in which Sylvia does her tricks, with all those funny looking cars from every country, and of all makes, and in just about every condition that a car can get into, and still get about on its own power. Of course, the Meeks hearse

will have an important part. That motion picture company sure has a collection of old cars on their lot!"

"The same studio?—So-o-o, as I suspected! It was you who sicked that pack of camera men on us when we arrived in Cucamonga!"

Hi blushed furiously and replied: "Guilty! but honest honey, I didn't intend to embarrass anyone! When you mentioned me meeting you with a brass band, it gave me an idea. I didn't know of any bandleader who would be willing to take his boys and their instruments out there among the smudge pots and play an overture to your entrance, for the price that I could afford to pay, so I decided on the next best thing. I knew of the motion picture industry's reputation for generosity to the underprivileged, so I hoped that this little stunt would give the Meeks family a break and perhaps give you an opportunity of meeting the right people. All film producers are interested in beautiful singers; by the way, did the representative from Horizon Pictures direct you to the Cockatoo?"

"Hi, you're sweet!" she said, with a smile that gave him to understand that she understood his motives; and approved of them. "The venture to the Cockatoo was all my own idea—with no pushing or prompting from anyone! During the afternoon, I read several articles about the place—who visited it, what they did for entertainment and so on, and just made up my mind to try to crash the gates; something like I did at the hospital. Well it worked out very satisfactorily to everyone concerned! Now Hi, since this is to be our last ride with Sylvia, you need not go the shortest route home, I am going to enjoy every minute of this ride. I know that Sylvia will be in good hands—and I'm proud of her chance to a share of fame and glory! Did you put her through all her tricks for them?"

"Yes," Hi replied, as he tilted her chin up and kissed her lips again, "I gave them her entire history, since I bought the original roadster, then of the different parts I sort of grafted on—then I showed them what she could do! Boy were they surprised! They admitted that they had never seen a car just like her; and she will be featured as 'SYLVIA, THE WONDER CAR!' The brand new two-door sedan that I am getting in exchange for her, will never take her place; but it will be a great help in getting us to our jobs and to the hospitals for our engagements. Yes, I'll have to give her up some time; and this seems to be the logical

place—Gee! I'll be one proud man when I see Sylvia appear as the star in a motion picture comedy!"

"And I'll be as proud as you are Hi!" Zenobia assured him tenderly, as she saw the wistful look in his eyes. That look reminded her of a little girl who gave her favorite doll to a collection for shipment to a foreign missionary, in the firm belief that the beloved dolly would make some poor child even more happy than it had her!

Hi pressed the starter. The cows grazing nearby gave a start and trotted away, as the little roadster wheezed and emitted a tin-like rattle. He turned onto the road and headed north, planning on a wide detour to Alhambra.

As though she was well aware of all that was transpiring, Sylvia responded to Hi's touch as he put her through all of her tricks for the last time. She shimmied, up a slight grade, did a rhumba along a shady stretch of road; and by a clever manipulation of the clutch, gas and the squeaky steering wheel, she did a good imitation of a waltz, then wheezed and coughed as Zenobia sang:

"I'VE FOUND MY RAINBOW".

THE END.

Note—Hi and Zenobia realized only after the trip was ended, and no Highway Patrolman had intercepted them, that it is unlawful to permit riders in a house trailer while traveling. They, the author and the publishers offer their humble apologies and a solemn promise that it will never happen again.







(Continued from front flap)

Starting from their home on Highway 66 in Oklahoma, both Zenobia and Hi eventually travel West and their paths cross under strange circumstances in new surroundings. Both have ambitions to succeed in Hollywood. The new friends they make enroute and the wonderful reception they receive in the West are surprising.

The route Zenobia and Hi each take and the novel method of traveling, the experiences and traveling companions met along the way are unusual indeed.





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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AUVERGNE MEREDITH spent her early childhood in the picturesque Ozarks. She has always been intensely interested in folklore, habits and customs of that famous region. It was the inspiration for many plots, stories and tales of strange, amusing and interesting fancies created in her mind.

Later her family arrived in Sapulpa, Oklahoma. In these surroundings of frontier oil industry, farming and the habits and stories of various tribes of Indians, the Creeks, Osages, Choctaws, Cherokees and Utes all afforded new and vastly different ideas for her stories.

She is the author of a number of short stories in children's magazines as well as those for adults.

Her first novel was "FROM SOUP TO NUTS" which was well received and encouraged her to do more and better writing.

Material for GLORY ROAD was gathered from incidents in the past and recently, of others' hopes, ambitions and achievements. Auvergne Meredith literally lives the part of each character she creates.

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